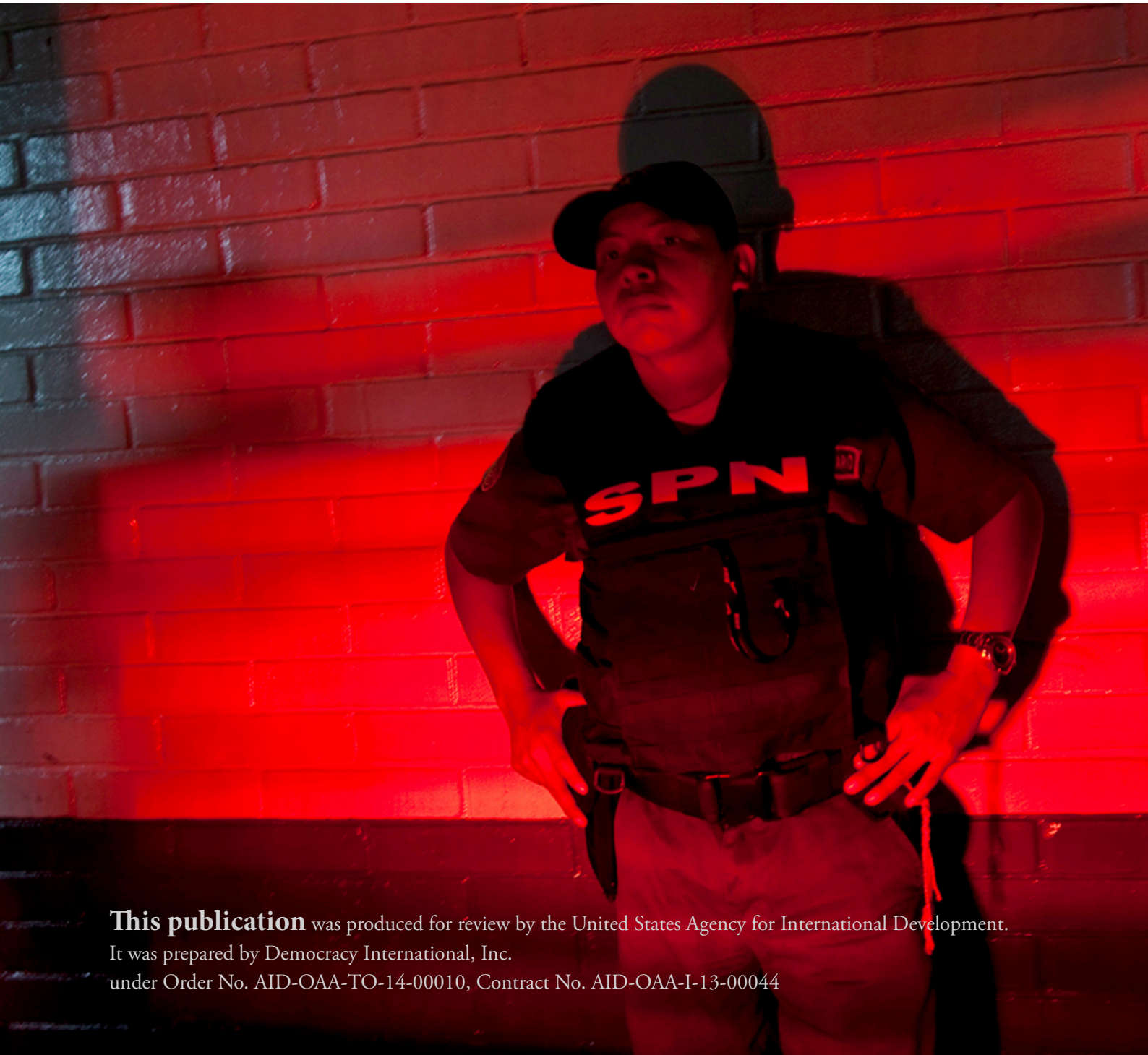




Homicides in Guatemala:

The Challenge and Lessons of Disaggregating Gang-Related and Drug Trafficking-Related Murders

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Acronyms	4
Research Report	5
Executive summary	5
Major Findings	6
Introduction	7
Methodology	11
Part I: Analyzing the Data	15
Analysis of the Homicides in Chiquimula	21
Analysis of the Homicides in Zona 18	28
Part II: Collecting the Data	36
Phase I: The Crime Scene	38
Phase II: The Investigation	41
Phase III: The Statistics	45
Conclusions	50
Recommendations	53
Investigative Team	54

List of Acronyms

CARSI	Central America Regional Security Initiative
CICIG	Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala
DEIC	Criminal Investigation Specialized Division
DIGICAM	Arms Registry Database
DTO	Drug Trafficking Organization
ESF	Economic Support Fund
JEPEDI	Command for Planning Strategy and Institutional Development
INACIF	National Institute of Forensic Sciences
INE	National Statistics Institute
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement
MP	Attorney General's Office (Ministerio Público)
MS13	Mara Salvatrucha
PNC	National Civil Police
RENAP	National Registry of Persons
SICOM	Integrated Case System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Research Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Discerning the motives and actors behind the scourge of homicides in the Northern Triangle region is too often left to high level officials who routinely attribute the vast majority of homicides to drug trafficking organizations and street gangs without necessarily assessing the data. While that is the politically expedient answer, it seems to be too easily accepted.

The reason this is important is that these classifications have wide-spread implications on local and international citizen security strategies and the distribution of resources in these countries. Denominating homicides as primarily “drug trafficking-related” or “gang-related” leads to an emphasis on bolstering security forces, frequently at the expense of other institutions and projects. A more nuanced understanding of homicide dynamics might open the door to softer approaches such as social programs aimed at lowering gender-based violence, or education and other youth-outreach projects.

In order to test the hypothesis that drug trafficking organizations and street gangs are behind the vast majority of homicides in the region, InSight Crime took a more systematic approach. We attempted to disaggregate homicide motives and actors by analyzing, case by case, homicides over a two-year period in two areas in Guatemala: one area that government officials denominated a “drug trafficking corridor”; another denominated as a “gang area.”

The project also analyzed the way in which authorities collect data in Guatemala and offers some preliminary suggestions as to how this process can be improved. In this way, InSight Crime hopes to provide international donors and local authorities with a better understanding of where they can provide assistance to police and other agencies that are collecting and analyzing homicide data. It also hopes to get close to understanding who and what are behind the homicides, so that governments and multilaterals can better allocate their limited resources.

Major Findings

1. We could not reasonably attribute motive nor assign blame to any one criminal group in over 35 percent of the cases.
2. In the trafficking corridor, we could reasonably attribute 28 percent of the homicides to organized crime-related activities; this is less than authorities normally publicly attribute to organize crime.
3. In the gang area, we could reasonably attribute 41 percent of the homicides to gang-related activities. This is in line with what authorities say in Guatemala.
4. There were some differences in the homicide dynamics of the two areas studied. The two areas differed in the age of the victims. There was a higher number of homicides with a firearm in the gang area than the drug trafficking area.
5. In both areas, the information from authorities was fragmented, disorganized and sometimes missing altogether.
6. Data collection suffers due to:
 - Multiple, clashing bureaucracies that are not speaking the same language, not administering the data on the same platforms or formats;
 - Differing criteria as it relates to how to classify the data;
 - Poor training and little emphasis placed on importance of collecting and analyzing data;
 - Some degree of technological challenges, including old computers and a lack of internet service;
 - A culture in which politically-salient statistical information is prioritized over information that will actually resolve cases or give authorities the ability to analyze criminal dynamics.



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

Introduction

When violence surged in early 2015 in Guatemala, then President Otto Pérez Molina knew how to handle the situation: blame the street gangs.

“One group murdered a guy from another group,” he told the press. “And that meant that in January more than 40 percent of the homicides were a result of a fight between these two maras.”¹

Just a few years earlier, then President of Guatemala Álvaro Colom attributed the rise in violence to “drug trafficking organizations” (DTOs), which he said were “invading” his country.² He later said the DTOs were responsible for up to 60 percent of the homicides.³

These presidents are not alone in their belief that most of the homicides in the region are related to street gangs and drug trafficking organizations. In 2015, Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernández told a gathering at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington DC that as much as 80 percent of the violence in his country could be attributed to organized crime.⁴

Many US officials cling to the same idea. In a 2014 Military Times Op-Ed, General John Kelly, then the head of US Southern Command, said that drug cartels and gangs were largely responsible for the rising violence in the region. “There are some in officialdom who argue that not 100 percent of the violence today is due to the drug flow to the US,” he wrote about the Northern Triangle nations of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. “And I agree, but I would say that perhaps 80 percent of it is.”⁵

We at InSight Crime have also fallen into this trap. We routinely cite these officials without questioning their sources or basis for understanding the dynamics of violence. Prestigious multilaterals and academics make the same claims. A 2011 World Bank report, for example, declared that, “Drug trafficking is quantitatively far more important than the other risk factors for violence.”⁶ (A more thorough critique of this statement appears later in this report.)

The emphasis on street gangs and drug trafficking organizations has a palpable impact on how money is allocated. In its analysis of the allocation of funds through the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), the Congressional Research Service said that 66 percent of the \$1.2 billion that CARSI administered in the region between 2008 and 2015, went through the Bureau of International Narcotics Law Enforcement (INL), the branch of the US State Department that manages hard-side assistance: drug interdiction programs; equipment and infrastructure enhancements for police and military personnel;

The emphasis on street gangs and drug trafficking organizations has a palpable impact on how money is allocated.

training and use of special police units that are focused on international narcotics trafficking and gangs. Another 31 percent goes through the Economic Support Fund (ESF) account, most of which is channeled through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).⁷ While most of USAID monies go to soft assistance -- violence prevention, social and economic programs -- some of this money goes to programs that support police in places like Honduras. Meanwhile, other CARSI money has gone towards the formation and maintenance of special anti-gang units.⁸

The emphasis on street gangs and DTOs also impacts domestic allocations of funds. Local allocations of funding are harder to discern, but from the early 2000s, the Northern Triangle countries have adopted a so-called “Mano Dura,” or “Iron Fist,” approach towards gangs. New laws with broad definitions of “gangs” were combined with police sweeps that incarcerated anyone who fit those broad definitions. The names of these programs have changed, but the core of the strategy remains the same: incarcerate en masse. Prison populations have swelled, but instead of slowing the growth of the gangs, the gang leaders have reorganized behind bars and have expanded their array of criminal activities.

More recently, the Northern Triangle governments have militarized their approach, implementing various states of siege in places where there was drug trafficking activity in Guatemala, enacting “emergency measures” inside jails and in particularly troublesome states in El Salvador, and using the military police in numerous places in Honduras. All three approaches use as their starting point that street gangs and DTOs are at the center of the violence, and illustrate the belief that the only way to slow their activities is to have a large physical presence to deter them from killing one another or innocent civilians. The results of these approaches have been mixed at best, and seem to represent short-term solutions to deep, social and economic problems.

The reality is that we do not know how much of the homicides in the Northern Triangle are related to DTOs and gangs. Criminal organizations have undoubtedly proliferated in recent years in Central America. While they vary from street gangs to DTOs to paramilitary mafias, they share some common characteristics: they take advantage of weak government institutions to control physical territory; they seem to thrive where new criminal economies have emerged and where they can diversify their own portfolios; they employ violence and the threat of violence in order to achieve their aims, be they political, criminal or other goals.

The impact of this criminal activity in the region is profound and most certainly includes violence. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most homicidal region in the world today. For a time, the five most homicidal nations on the planet were in the region; three of those

are the ones that make up the Northern Triangle.⁹ According to a recent United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Latin America and the Caribbean saw homicides increase by 12 percent between 2002 and 2012; it was the only region in the world where homicide rates rose.¹⁰ Eleven countries in the region had homicide rates that would qualify as “epidemic,” the UNDP report said, including the aforementioned Northern Triangle nations.¹¹

When faced with an incomplete picture as we frequently are when it comes to rising presence of gangs and DTOs, and increasing violence in the region, the easy conclusion is to say that these events are related, but the fact is that there are few analyses of the homicide data to tell us who the victims are; how they have been killed; what the official investigations tell us about these criminal events; and who the presumed murderers are. Conclusive evidence is nearly impossible to obtain given that impunity rates in these countries is so high and data is sparse, uneven and poorly managed.

What’s more, the preliminary conclusions issued routinely by politicians, policymakers and experts alike seem to ignore worldwide and regional studies that indicate homicide is the result of a complex set of inter-related factors that can be both personal and communal.¹² The UNDP’s recent Human Development Report, for instance, cited four major motors of violence.¹³ First, they noted the high incidence of what they call “aspirational crimes,” which they connected to questions of inequality -- not poverty -- and social mobility. Second, they offered a “social fabric” theory, which focuses on upheaval in the household: the number of single parent households has doubled in last 30 years; there have been rapid urbanization and economic shifts that come with trade liberalization and other macroeconomic changes. Third, they cited “crime drivers” -- weapons, alcohol, and illegal drugs. Finally, they looked at “institutional weakness” in countries where they found the most violence.

Certainly the Northern Triangle’s violence is just as complex. In a report on organized crime in Central America, the UNODC said that the presence of drug trafficking can lead to upticks in violence but can also lead to declines. It is, in other words, part of a series of factors that contribute to homicides, not the motor of them. “The key driver of violence is not cocaine, but change: change in the negotiated power relations between and within groups, and with the state,” they wrote. “For progress to be made, the risk of aggravating violence in the short term must be taken into account.”¹⁴

It is important we understand more about the complex combination of factors that go into rising homicides in the region.

This question about what are the drivers of homicides in the region comes at a critical moment. In December 2015, the US Congress passed the “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016,” which allocated \$750 million to assist Central America in its fight against crime and violence.¹⁵ What was not surprising was that most of this aid is headed to the Northern Triangle. What is surprising is that the bill tries to shift the balance more in the direction of soft assistance; INL is managing only 30 percent of the aid, and some of this INL funding is going towards “forensic technology” and the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala - CICIG), two initiatives that are designed to fight structural issues as opposed to specific criminal groups

involved in the violence. Still, much of the assistance will be aimed at stemming violence, so it is important we understand more about the complex combination of factors that go into rising homicides in the region.

This project was established to begin to fill that knowledge gap. Our intent was to disaggregate motives and actors -- with a special emphasis on gang controlled areas and drug trafficking corridors -- involved in homicides in Guatemala. The end goal was to provide authorities, citizen security specialists and other stakeholders with more nuanced information regarding the dynamics of violence, so that they can better determine intervention strategies in areas with high homicide rates and areas where there the presumed level of gang- and drug trafficking-related violence is high.

We also studied the way authorities collected and analyzed information from the crime scenes. Data collection in these countries is spotty at best and, in most cases, inadequate. Governments put little emphasis or resources towards analyzing the information they do collect. The project both analyzes the information we did obtain and obtains better understanding of the data collection methods, processes, and other dynamics limiting collection and/or analysis of the information. It is important to note that this is not a study of impunity, and, although we touch on data collection methods, this study does not cover best practices but rather looks for ways in which the Guatemalan system is deficient.

We have therefore organized this study into those two major parts. The first part of the analysis focuses on determining, with as much precision as possible, how many murders we can reasonably attribute to the drug trafficking organizations and the gangs in two specific areas of Guatemala. This section uses as its foundation an analysis of the crime scene reports generated by the police in one area that is a known drug trafficking corridor and another area that is a known area of gang influence. It also uses numerous interviews that we did with police investigators, government prosecutors and Attorney General's Office analysts about who and what are behind the homicides, both on a local and a national level.

The second part is an analysis of the ways in which the police, the Attorney General's Office and other crime-fighting bodies collect and process the information they obtain during these homicide investigations. This part places a particular emphasis on illustrating just where the system can, and often does, fail, thereby contributing to the discussion about how to improve these processes.

Methodology

Based on authorities' statements noted earlier, as well as dozens of interviews with police officials, prosecutors and crime analysts, the project began with one basic hypothesis:

- Gang- and drug trafficking-related activity are behind the bulk of homicides in the Northern Triangle. The potential policy implications for this hypothesis are that these countries may require, at least initially, more of a law and order approach, strengthening of police and judicial actors with an eye towards dismantling these criminal organizations.

In order to test this hypothesis, we:

- **Identified one (1) drug trafficking corridor**,¹⁶ which had a homicide rate above the national average.
- **Identified one (1) gang controlled territory**¹⁷ - neighborhood, district or similar and comparable jurisdiction, which had a homicide rate above the national average.
- **Analyzed** all the available data on homicides in those areas during a two-year period between using information from police, and in some sporadic cases, information from forensic medicine units, the Attorney General's Office, other government agencies tracking homicides, as well as from non-governmental organizations, universities, think tanks and media;
- **Critically assessed** preliminary determinations and corroborated, when possible, assertions regarding drug trafficking- and gang-related homicides in those areas.

As per the current standard classification practice of law-enforcement agencies, we distinguished between drug trafficking- and gang-related homicides by looking for specific markers in each event that tend to be closely related to each type of murder; and that differ from homicides associated to personal, cultural or socio-economic violence.¹⁸ These markers include the characteristics of the victim, the type of weapon used, the location of the event and, when available, corroborating information from media or official sources. When two or more of these markers are present, we estimate that there is a higher probability that a specific event can be classified as gang- or DTO-related.

The markers for DTO-related murders include:

- a. Use of high-caliber or sophisticated weaponry, particularly automatic and semi-automatic assault rifles and 9 mm firearms.
- b. Signs of torture.

- c. Post-mortem displacement of the body, particularly when it is dumped in a highly visible location, which would imply the desire for publicity.
- d. Presence of threatening messages near or on the victim's body, including symbolic mutilations.
- e. Direct or circumstantial evidence of the victim's participation in DTO-related activities, including known criminal associations, prior offenses and witnesses' testimony.

The markers for gang-related homicides include:

- a. Use of high-caliber pistols and revolvers, but also sharp and blunt objects.
- b. Direct or circumstantial evidence of the victim's participation in gang activities, including tattoos, gang paraphernalia, known gang associations, prior offenses and witnesses' testimony.
- c. Direct or circumstantial evidence of the victim's connection to gang activities, such as paying extortion or witnessing criminal activities.

It is possible that both a DTO- and a gang-related homicide share one or more of these markers. Furthermore, it is also possible that the direct or circumstantial evidence of the victim's involvement in criminal activities does not meet the standard that would be necessary to introduce it at trial. We tried to overcome these limitations by analyzing as much raw data as possible for each case, such as witness statements, police reports and corroborating media sources. We also followed-up on some of the cases with the police and the Attorney General's Office investigators when possible.

We did this research in Guatemala where there are four sources of data on homicides: the National Civil Police (Policía Nacional Civil - PNC), the National Institute of Forensic Sciences (Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses - INACIF), the Attorney General's Office (Ministerio Público - MP) and the National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas - INE).

The PNC records data from the crime scene. Police have information on the victims of violence, both dead and wounded (sex, approximate age, and to a lesser degree, the profession), including where the criminal act occurred and the type of weapon used (knife or other sharp object, by hand, or a firearm). Generally, PNC homicide figures are lower than those of INACIF because the latter receives the bodies of people injured as police search the crime scene, some of whom later die in the hospitals.¹⁹

On the other hand, in some cases the INACIF has overestimated homicidal violence because they often include suicides and accidents in their homicide totals.²⁰ INACIF also does not report where the crimes have occurred, but rather where the autopsy took place, which is frequently in the central office in Guatemala or in their various regional offices making it very difficult to map the homicides using this data.

In principle, the MP has the highest quality data on homicides because it is the repository for all the information on the case and can assess all of these sources prior to making the determination of whether or not the person was murdered, died due to natural causes or by accident.²¹ In addition to information its own investigators have, the PNC and the INACIF also feed the MP with data. In the case of MP, however, they rely on criminal complaints, often initiated at the time of the crime or shortly thereafter, in order to begin a homicide investigation. For its part, the INACIF will refer to autopsies that are “possibly related to criminal acts under investigation” but stops short of offering possible motives or actors behind the homicides. The PNC data distinguishes between homicides, suicides and accidents. None of these sources, however, has deep analysis or information regarding motives or presumed actors behind the homicides. (More on this process and the results of our investigation later in the report.)

The INE is responsible for collating and organizing this information. However, the INE also generates its own data, called “Vital Statistics,” which follows protocol laid out by the 10th edition of the International Classification of Diseases. The INE gets much of its information from the National Registry of Persons (RENAP), which certifies deaths and indicates whether it was a homicide, suicide or an accidental death. However, this source does not include information on the motive or those responsible for the homicides.

The project sought to get around these problems by obtaining information from the crime scenes themselves, from which we hoped to see certain patterns that we could establish as “gang-related” or “drug trafficking-related” homicides, the two ways authorities most often describe homicides. Specifically, we sought information on two areas that government officials from the Interior Ministry (Ministerio de Gobernación) said fit our criteria: Chiquimula therefore represented a “trafficking corridor”; the Zona 18 of Guatemala City represented a “gang area.” This was based on intelligence and law enforcement officials’ assessments of these areas, collated at the Ministry of the Interior.

*Chiquimula
represented a
“trafficking corridor”;
the Zona 18 of
Guatemala City
represented a “gang
area.”*

Over a period of several months, we filed Freedom of Information requests (“derecho de petición”) for national data and subnational data from the PNC, INACIF and the MP on homicides, potential motives and other related data that would help us establish motive and actors involved in the homicides for both those areas and the nation as a whole. The data we received, however, only gave us only a surface-understanding of these motives and actors.

Given the limitations of these findings, we requested and obtained access to the preliminary police reports in homicide cases in the Zona 18 and Chiquimula. These files are not digitalized, so we had to go to the police stations, search out the physical files, and take photographs of these reports. We also requested access to the Attorney General’s Office case files of these homicide cases. This access was granted but only in cases that were cleared. Unfortunately, these represented but a fraction of the total cases that we found in the police files and were not helpful.

In order to help us fill in the knowledge gaps or help us corroborate what we were finding in the police reports as it related to the dynamics of violence in these areas as well as on a national level, we spoke to police investigators and analysts from the Attorney General's Office. Most of these interviews were off the record but represent an important cross-section of understanding as it relates to violence in Guatemala. Nonetheless, it is important to note that they are these individuals' perceptions and are not based on any analytics or a systematic study of the information available.

Throughout, we chronicled the way the different agencies collect and process data. We studied the amount of resources they dedicate to writing this information on paper and entering it into computers, many of which were several years old. We went to their data headquarters to see how they channeled information and organized it. And we interviewed those who are working in these data collection centers or have overseen efforts to improve and consolidate this process on local and national levels. This, as will be made evident later in this report, is not a smooth process and numerous opportunities to use this information are missed along the way.



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

PART I

Analyzing the Data

In the last decade, homicides in Guatemala have obeyed a fairly steady pattern. Guatemala City and some of its surrounding municipalities have the greatest sheer number of homicides. Other states, particularly along the eastern border have the highest homicide rates. Among these are the departments of Escuintla, Zacapa, and Chiquimula. The northern department of Petén, which encompasses nearly a third of the country's land mass, also routinely has some of the highest homicide rates.²²

There are multiple explanations for this distribution of homicides, but there is no consensus and few systematic studies to back these theories. **The first theory** is that drug trafficking is at the heart of the violence in these areas. An oft-cited World Bank study on violence in Central America²³ quotes an unpublished paper by Cuevas and Demombynes.²⁴ The researchers used an econometric model of crime levels based on: drug seizures; demographic factors that contribute to violence (large population of youth and single-mother households); a classification of areas based on whether they were conflict zones during the civil wars; and socioeconomic data. They found that drug trafficking was by far the most important of these indicators.

“Within any one country, controlling for other factors, drug trafficking hotspots have murder rates more than double those in areas of low trafficking intensity,” the World Bank report stated. “For example, a 10 percent increase in female-headed households would lead to a 1 percent increase in the homicide rate. Similarly, a 10 percent rise in the population share of 15- to 34-year-olds would lead to an increase in the homicide rate of about 9 percent. At the other extreme, a jump in narcotics trafficking large enough to make an area a drug traffic hotspot would produce a 111 percent increase in the homicide rate.”²⁵

The proxy used to determine these hotspots, however, is questionable. First, there are only a small number of seizures of drugs in Guatemala as a whole. In 2015, for example, 7.25 metric tons were seized by the Guatemalan government, a relatively high number for this

country compared to years past.²⁶ The US government, however, believes that hundreds of tons pass through Guatemala; and Guatemalan authorities say that these drugs move through various corridors that include some of the most, and some of the least, violent areas.

What's more, as Juan Carlos Garzón pointed out in a recent study for Igarapé and the Fundación Ideas para la Paz, the drug seizures proxy would lead us to believe that Panama and Costa Rica should be the most violent countries in Central America when they are in fact the least.²⁷ Furthermore, as Garzón noted, criminal organizations can regulate violence as much as they can cause it.²⁸ A case in point is Huehuetenango, one of Guatemala's least violent departments. InSight Crime has done extensive field research on the principal trafficking group in the area, known as the Huistas.²⁹ The Huistas make a concerted effort to control levels of violence in their area of influence to win favor with the local communities and to avoid unwanted attention from the authorities.

In short, the dynamic of drug trafficking is not limited to the eastern part of the country where the violence is traditionally concentrated, so how do we explain the lower levels of violence in the western part of the country? We cannot. While there are theories related to how the more "indigenous" western highlands are less prone to violence than the more "ladino" eastern states,³⁰ these theories are in their infancy and not the subject of this study.³¹

The second theory is that street gangs are responsible for much of the spike in homicide rates. This may be true in places like Guatemala City and its surroundings. There is a widespread perception that gangs and their predatory criminal economy, such as extortion, are key drivers for violence. Victimization surveys seem to support this theory.

However, gangs in Guatemala remain a very urban phenomenon. The difference in perception, for example, was evident in a recent study done by the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop in Guatemala. The survey -- which was done in the departments of Guatemala, Petén, Quetzaltenango, San Marcos and Chiquimula -- found that 40 percent of those polled in Guatemala had a significant concern about extortion versus just 13 percent in the other areas.³²

Victimization surveys, it should be noted, are also deceiving. A study on violence in Guatemala by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from December 2007, showed that perceptions of who was responsible for insecurity in their neighborhoods in Guatemala City changed dramatically between 2004 and 2007, moving from "gangs" to "common thieves," even while the situation itself was largely static. That change, the report surmised, was as much related to how the media covered the issue, as it was security strategies implemented by the state.³³

The third major theory revolves around the availability of firearms. In Central America, 73 percent of homicides occur at the end of a gun, compared to a worldwide average of 41 percent.³⁴ In Guatemala, this number was 75 percent in 2015, according to INACIF data. The widespread availability of firearms in Central America was also covered in the World Bank study, which showed Guatemala as having the highest number of guns per capita in the region.³⁵ (*See Table 1*)

Table 1

Firearms Owned by Civilians in Central America (2007)			
Country	Registered	Estimated	Guns per 100 people
Costa Rica	43,241	115,000	2.8
El Salvador	198,000	450,000	7.0
Guatemala	147,581	1,950,000	15.8
Honduras	133,185	450,000	6.2
Nicaragua	N/A	385,000	7.0
Panama	96,600	525,600	5.4
Source: Karp 2008; Arias Foundation 2005 / Courtesy: World Bank Report insightcrime.org			

To get a better understanding of the dynamics of the violence, we did several Freedom of Information requests from the government regarding homicides between 2012 - 2015. From the police, we received information regarding their designations of the homicides following the preliminary police reports. As we detail below, that categorization has extreme limitations. It is done by personnel that is not trained in crime analysis, and it is based on fragmented and preliminary presumptions of the first responders.

It is not surprising then that 49 percent of the homicides are categorized as “unknown” (“desconocido”), and 37 percent of the homicides are categorized as “personal vengeance” (“venganza personal”), a meaningless category since it is so broad, and it is impossible to tell who or what was behind it. This was followed by victims of a robbery or armed assault (“víctima de robo”), which represented five percent of the total. Behind these designations stood gangs. Even if we group three types of violent acts in a single “gang” category -- “gang rivalry” (“rivalidad entre pandillas”), “victim of gangs” (“víctima de maras”) and “victim of extortion” (“víctima de extorsión”) -- they still represent just four percent of the homicides. The other homicides, according to the police, are the result of a mixture of drug trafficking-related murders (“narcotráfico”), stray bullets (“bala perdida”), fights (“riña”), land disputes (“problema de tierras”), “crimes of passion” (“pasional”) and others. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Homicide Motives (2012 - 2015)						
Motive	Y2012	Y2013	Y2014	Y2015	Sum 2012-15	Percentage
Riot	3	0	0	16	19	0%
Stray bullet	41	38	33	35	147	1%
Line of duty	3	19	12	4	38	0%
Delinquent	76	29	98	80	283	1%
Unknown	1,673	2,563	3,075	2,538	9,849	49%
Debt	1	0	0	0	1	0%
Argument	88	79	56	70	293	1%
Killed by police	0	13	4	0	17	0%
Extortionist	22	7	11	5	45	0%
Protest	6	2	0	0	8	0%
Drug trafficking	14	7	3	1	25	0%
Crime of passion	73	37	40	37	187	1%
Land squabble	0	0	2	0	2	0%
Fight	9	3	12	13	37	0%
Rivalry between gangs	86	97	80	91	354	2%
Kidnapper	1	0	1	0	2	0%
Personal vengeance	2,604	2,020	1,317	1,605	7,546	37%
Victim an attack	1	0	0	0	1	0%
Victim of extortion	31	53	37	61	182	1%
Victim of gangs	56	13	39	13	121	1%
Victim of robbery	340	244	153	184	921	5%
Victim of kidnapping	7	3	5	6	21	0%
Victim of rape	2	1	4	4	11	0%
Familial violence	10	25	16	15	74	1%
TOTAL	5,155	5,253	4,998	4,778	20,184	100%
Source: PNC					insightcrime.org	

Remarkably, for all the talk about drug trafficking-related murders from the highest officials, the PNC reported only 25 homicides in three years as drug trafficking-related. The flaws in the methodology were evident after a June 2013 massacre of nine police officers in Salcajá, Quetzaltenango. The motive was recorded as in “the line of duty,” but from the beginning it was clear that this was the result of drug trafficking feud in the region. It is not clear why the police used this classification.

Pinpointing the drug trafficking-related homicides makes for an even more absurd picture. In 2012, there were nine drug trafficking-related homicides in Guatemala City, three in Sanarate, El Progreso; one in Moyuta, Jutiapa, and another in Jalapa, Jalapa. In 2013, two were chronicled in San Miguel Petapa, Guatemala, and one in Guatemala City; one in La Gomera, Escuintla; one in Retalhuleu, Retalhuleu; and two others in Quetzaltenango, Quetzaltenango. In 2014, two were chronicled in Mixco, Guatemala and one in Guatemala City. In 2015, there was one. In sum, there is no discernable pattern or trend in this information.

For their part, gang-related homicides chronicled by the police -- i.e., gang rivalries, victims of gangs, and extortion -- showed a fairly steady trend (173, 163, 156, and 165) in terms of numbers of cases registered over the years. But like drug trafficking-related homicides, the amount attributed to gangs was far below what officials have stated on the record. As noted earlier, most of these occurred in and around Guatemala City. In 2014, for example, between 84 and 87 percent of the violence attributed to gangs occurred in the Department of Guatemala. (See Table 3)

Table 3

Gang-Related Homicides: Department of Guatemala (2014)			
Municipality	Victims of gang rivalries	Extortion victims	Victims of gangs
Amatitlán	1	1	1
Chinautla	3	2	1
Chuaranchi	0	0	1
Fraijanes	0	0	0
Guatemala City	25	15	16
Mixco	16	2	1
Palencia	0	1	1
San José del Golfo	0	0	0
San José Pinula	1	0	0
San Juan Sacatepequez	9	1	0
San Miguel Petata	0	4	2
San Pedro Ayampuc	1	1	0
San Pedro Sacatepequez	0	0	0
San Raymundo	0	1	0
Santa Catarina Pinula	2	1	2
Villa Canales	5	0	1
Villa Nueva	6	2	8
TOTAL	69	31	34
Source: PNC		insightcrime.org	

Our efforts with the Attorney General's Office were also frustrating. We requested and received data of the crimes and the office's categorization of these crimes during the years 2012-2014. However, their categorization was too broad to give us any deep understanding of the dynamics of homicides.

We followed this up with a request to view the type of weapon that was used in the murders. However, aside from the general differentiation between firearm, knife or machete, and a blunt object, the MP barely registers any information. In 2014, for example, the MP registered the use of a firearm in just 592 of 4,276 homicide cases. What's more, the MP said the specific type of firearm was "not registered" ("no registrado") in 92 percent of those cases.

There are several possible explanations for this: the information was not available; this is not part of their normal information gathering process; the information did not seem relevant; the information was sensitive or put them in danger (e.g., if the weapons had markings that illustrated they had come from the police or the armed forces).

Given these limitations, we turned our attention to two areas where we believed we could better test the hypotheses that drug trafficking-related murders (Chiquimula) and gang-related murders (Zona 18, Guatemala City) are driving the homicide rates. Below are our findings.

Analysis of the Homicides in Chiquimula

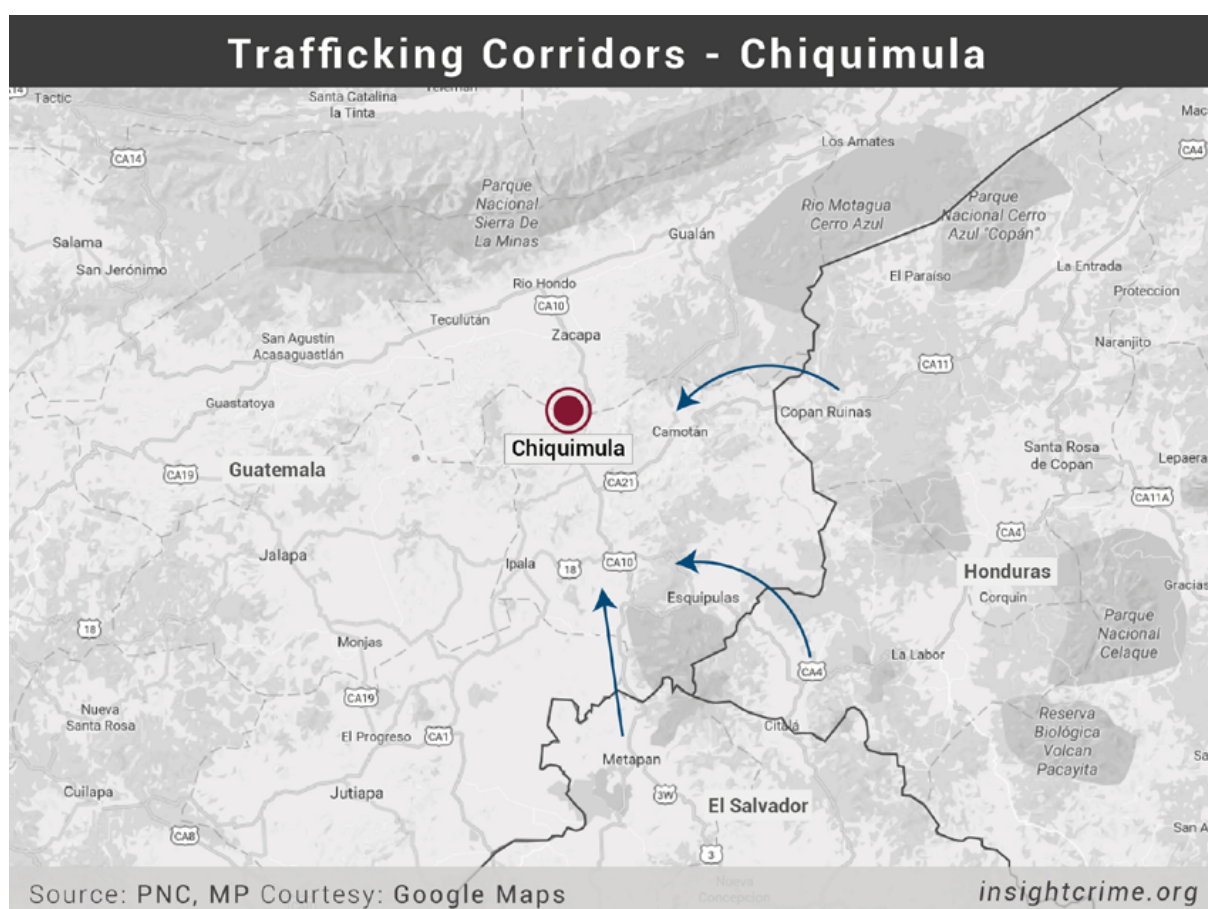
The municipality of Chiquimula is the capital of the department of the same name. According to population projections of the National Statistics Institute (INE), by 2015, it has a population of close to 100,000. Located along the border with Honduras and El Salvador, Chiquimula is also an important corridor for contraband, illegal drugs, human smuggling and other illegal activities. (See Map 1)

Map 1



As can be seen in the map 2 (See Map 2), Chiquimula is connected to the most important contraband routes from those countries, such as Copán, Honduras; Ocotepeque, El Salvador; and Metapán, El Salvador.

For many years, large operators have made Chiquimula their home and area of operation. This includes Byron Berganza who was captured, extradited, convicted and sentenced in the United States for drug trafficking; and Giovanni España, who was assassinated in 2010 by suspected members of the Zetas criminal organization. Currently, there are others suspected traffickers in the department, most notably the Chegüén family, the patriarch of which was recently incarcerated and is awaiting trial on murder charges.



Chiquimula has also long been one of the most homicidal places in the country. Between 2001 - 2014, the municipality averaged 78 murders a year, according to police data. This homicide rate did not always correspond with the national homicide rate. While the national homicide rate began to rise in 2000, in Chiquimula it dropped during those same years. It then rebounded and peaked in 2009, along with the rest of the country. The national decline of homicides in recent years on a national level has not corresponded to Chiquimula where homicides went up and have stayed high.

In every year but one (2003), the homicide rate in Chiquimula has been higher than the national average. Yet, in other ways, it follows national patterns. The age and sex of the victims are largely the same as national statistics. And the type of weapons used are similar: 78 percent of the murders were committed with a firearm, 16 percent with knives, 4 percent with a blunt object, and 2 percent were strangled, according to INACIF data.

InSight Crime obtained the preliminary police reports for nearly every homicide reported in the municipality of Chiquimula during 2014 - 2015, in an attempt to better ascertain the motives and actors behind the homicides. Like the national data provided by authorities, the results are fragmented and incomplete. Nonetheless, we can see some patterns.

To begin with, there are numerous incidents -- especially during 2015 -- in which the victims are shot multiple times or there are signs of torture, bodies are moved, high caliber weapons are involved, or there is a modus operandi that indicates the presence of a sophisticated, well-armed, clearly intentioned organization at the crime scene. As noted in the methodology

section, these are the indicators that we are using to determine if something could be related to drug trafficking activity.

However, the local dynamics of the area are of critical importance and lead us to an important preliminary determination: drug trafficking is an incorrect way of describing the dynamics behind this violence. As noted, one of the groups that was most active in the area during this time period was known as the Chegüén. The Chegüén's leader is Eduardo Chegüén Sagastume, from which they draw their name. He and eight others from his organization were arrested in 2014,³⁶ but all the officials that InSight Crime spoke to said they continue to operate from jail.

Their services include trafficking drugs, for which they use a series of intra-municipal bus companies they own. According to the MP's investigation of the organization,³⁷ the drivers of these companies are used "to gather useful information." But the Chegüén also have a vibrant loan sharking business, and they have a formidable hitmen-for-hire business. What's more, people who work for them, such as lawyers, can also come in the line of fire, as may have happened recently in Chiquimula,³⁸ according to police and judicial sources in the area.

The point is that there were numerous illegal businesses that can be at the heart of violent crime even if we are talking about one single criminal organization, something former Interior Minister Francisco Jiménez once categorized as the "cascading effect" of drug money.³⁹ A look at the homicides and the information compiled by the police shows how these tendencies play out. In the two-year period studied, at least six bus drivers and one bus assistant were killed. At least two of these drivers worked for Chegüén's companies. In only one of these attacks was anything allegedly stolen from the bus. In the other cases, the attacks had indications that they were premeditated and were aimed at the driver.

There are also a number of cases in which the word "loans" or small-time "loan shark" ("prestamista") comes up in the preliminary investigation or in the media reports. Again, these did not include robberies. In one case, for example, a woman who had worked as a loan shark opened her door and was shot dead. And others, such as the lawyer, seemed to have paid the price for association.

"We know that he was involved in something but we don't know what."

The interviews with the police and local prosecutors reinforce the idea that homicides are related to multiple factors, only one of which might be "drug trafficking." Prosecutors interviewed by InSight Crime said they could reasonably attribute up to 25 homicides to the Chegüén in the period between 2013-2015. But they could not necessarily discern motive behind all the murders due to the fact that the organization was diverse and also had a murder-for-hire business. They also could not rule out that some of their personnel freelanced.

"There are times in which the assassination is super violent and there are rumors from people who say: 'We know that he was involved in something but we don't know what.' (Or), 'They said that this person was a loan shark,'" one of the prosecutors in Chiquimula

explained. “This same Chegüén network was loan sharking. They collected money every week and if you didn’t pay, you got threatened and after that, you got assassinated.”

The prosecutors connected the criminal acts in the Chegüén cases by using not just testimony but the ballistic evidence. They said the hitmen for Chegüén used the same weapon for at least eight of the murders. The same connection was made as they were studying another group, which they nicknamed “Los España,” because the killers and the victims were from the same family whose last name was España. The source of the dispute in the España case, however, was less clear, although the investigators believe it was related to land or inheritance issues.

“In the majority of homicides or assassinations that we’ve done, it’s a fight over land. There are very few homicides where a criminal network is involved,” the head of the Chiquimula prosecutor’s office, Hugo Rosales, said. “The thing is that the boundaries are not well marked, and the neighbors can’t reach an agreement, and that’s why they take violent actions.”

Police investigators seconded this thesis. They told InSight Crime that there are no clear ways of mediating these land disputes, which is what opens the door to violence. And then once one family takes the life of another, a chain of retribution can begin that can last for years. These cases are easier to distinguish from the others, both the police and prosecutors say, because of where they happen (rural areas) and the type of weapon used (blunt objects, such as knives or machetes).

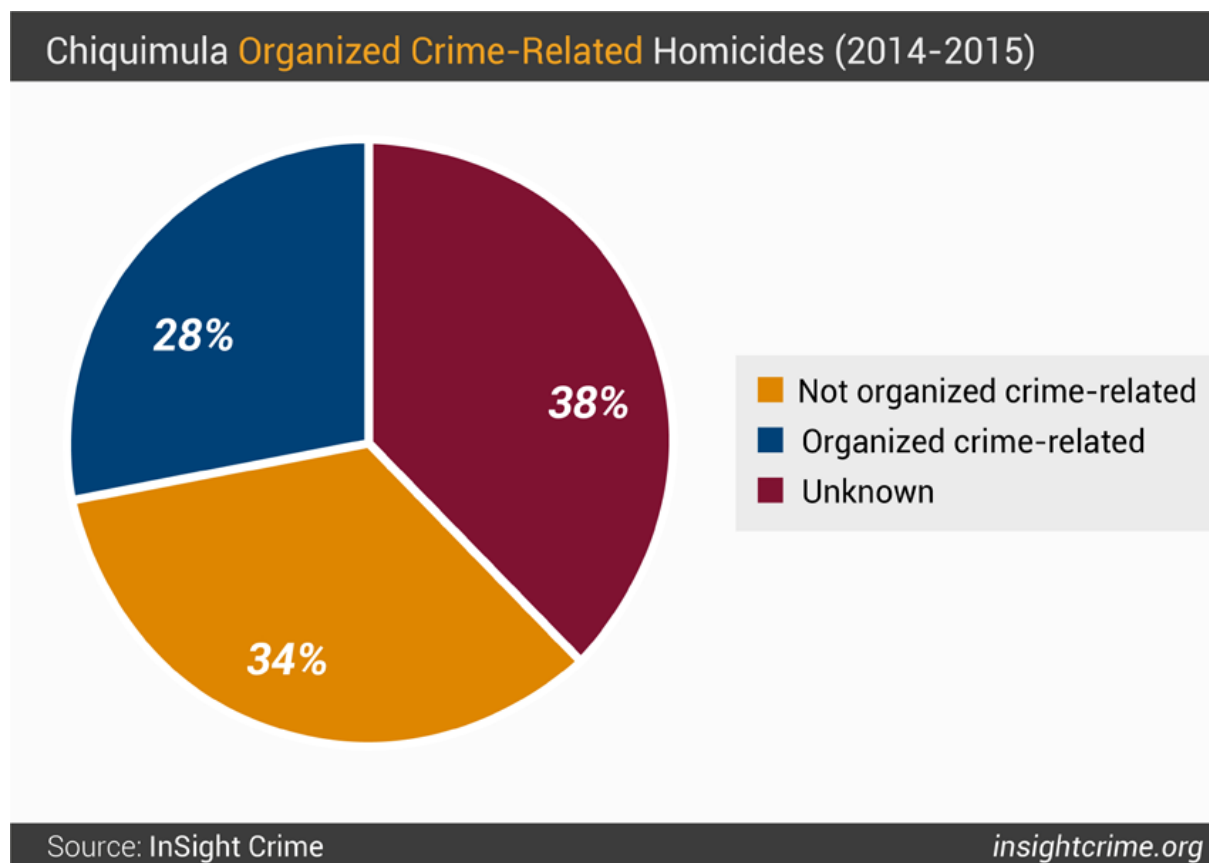
Vigilantism is also common, both prosecutors and police say. There are, for instance, no indications that gangs are present in Chiquimula. The local refrain is, “gang member seen, gang member dead” (“marero visto, marero muerto”). “When a gang member appears (in the town), they kill him,” one police investigator flatly told InSight Crime.

Distinguishing between these various criminal acts is made even harder by the fact that the local investigators do not resolve any cases, so speculation, even on their end, abounds. Of the 198 murder cases they logged in the municipality between 2013 and 2015, they had cleared three of them by the time this report was published. (The Chegüén case, which included murder charges, was passed to the organized crime unit in Guatemala City, so it does not count.) The reasons for this low clearance rate are many and not the subject of this investigation. Prosecutors say they are overloaded. One prosecutor told InSight Crime he currently had over 7,000 cases of all types, not just homicides. They also cite fear, lack of resources, incompetence, and bureaucracy.

The end result is that in order for us to come any closer to understanding the dynamic of homicides from an analytic perspective, we have to rely on the police’s preliminary reports. As noted in the section on data collection, these reports are not well organized. To be sure, July and December of 2014 were missing. What’s more, there is no indication of any cases linked to drug trafficking organizations, unless we use the term to describe the Chegüén group. So in characterizing this multi-layered underworld, we have opted for the words “organized crime,”⁴⁰ even while using the same criteria for determining these homicides established for “drug trafficking-related” homicides in the methodology section.

Of the 143 murder cases in Chiquimula chronicled by the police during 2014 and 2015, we classified 40, or about 28 percent, of the homicides as possibly related to organized crime. Another 49 homicides, or 34 percent, we can say with some degree of confidence have no relation with organized crime. And 54 homicides, or 38 percent, are unknown, meaning they could be related to organized crime or not, but we simply cannot say with any degree of confidence one way or the other. (See Figure 1)

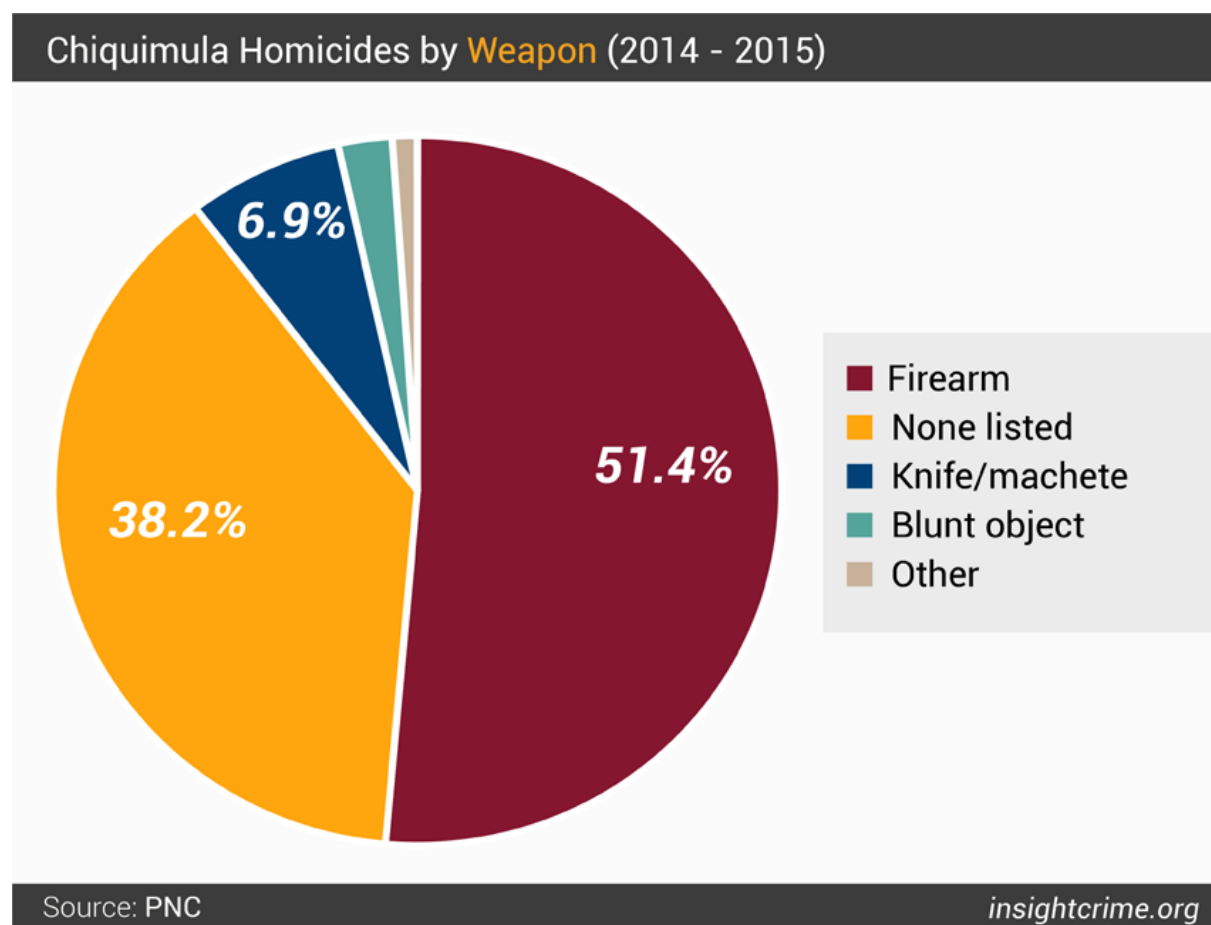
Figure 1



The reasons for placing most of these murders in the organized crime category were related mostly to modus operandi. The factors that stood out the most were where the murders took place (very often in public places), the means by which they were executed (very often from motorcycles), the type of weapon employed (high caliber pistol or assault rifle), and the number of bullets expended. In a few cases the body had been moved after an obvious execution with multiple rounds. We eliminated the possibility of organized crime by looking closely at the weapon employed, the place of the murder, the limited testimonies available either from the police reports or the press reports that we could use to cross check this information.⁴¹

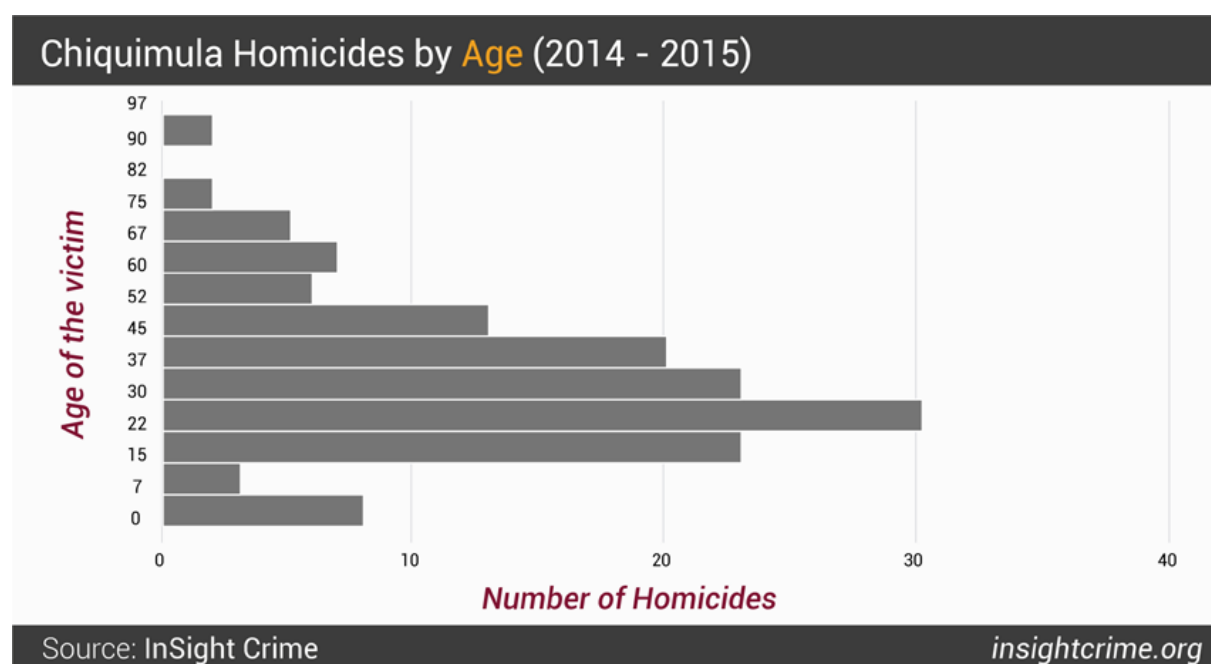
In general terms, there are other important aspects to note. First, as the prosecutors and police pointed out, the type of weapon used in the murder also varies somewhat from the national average. In only 47 percent of the cases did the police state that a firearm was clearly used to kill the victim or victims. This number obviously could and most likely did rise significantly after the autopsies; in nearly half the 104 cases analyzed, the police refrained from hypothesizing about the weapon employed. Still, the police reported that there is significant number of victims whose injuries were more consistent with injuries from a sharp or a blunt object rather than a firearm. (See Figure 2)

Figure 2



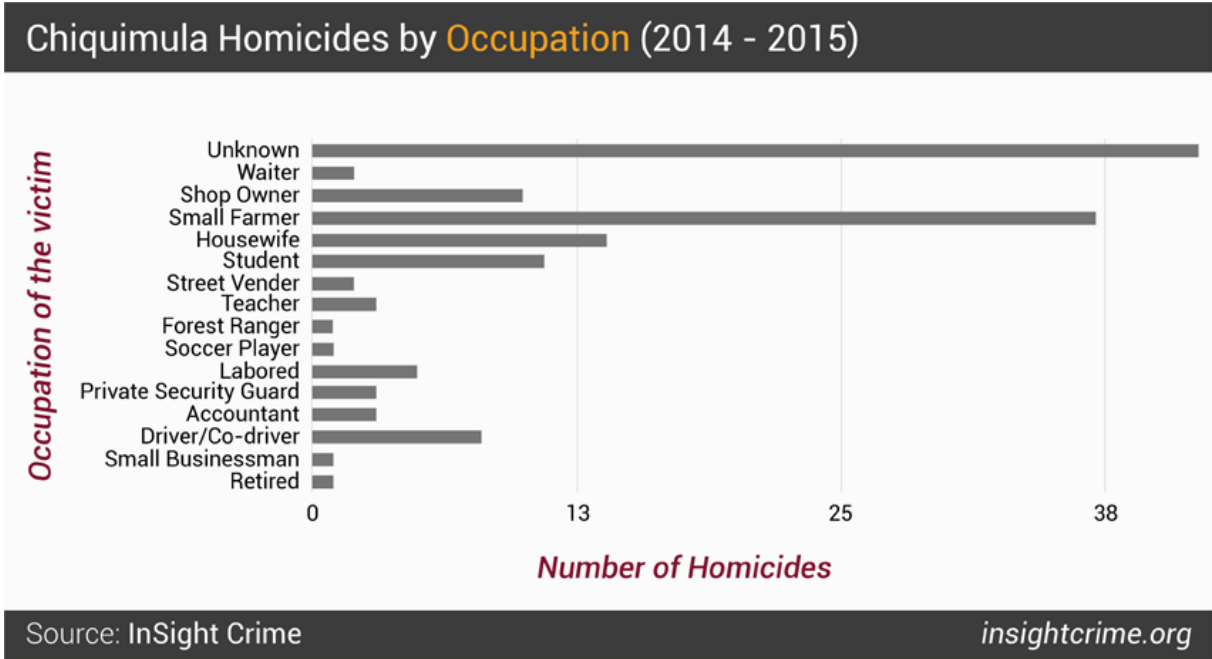
The average age of the victims, 35, is consistent with that of the department as a whole but also different from the national average. There is little this tells us, aside from the fact that the victims are older than urban homicide victims who die in large numbers in their late teens and early twenties. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3



In terms of their occupation, the most oft-cited job for victims is that small farmer -- again, consistent with the testimonies of the prosecutors and police who believe that much of the homicides are related to disputes over land or longstanding family feuds. This is followed by “housewife,” “student,” “driver/assistant,” and “shop owner.” A large number of victims’ occupations are unknown and could be important to understanding the dynamics of violence. Still, given the variety of professions, it is hard to discern any overriding pattern aside from perhaps the rural nature of the violence. (See Figure 4)

Figure 4

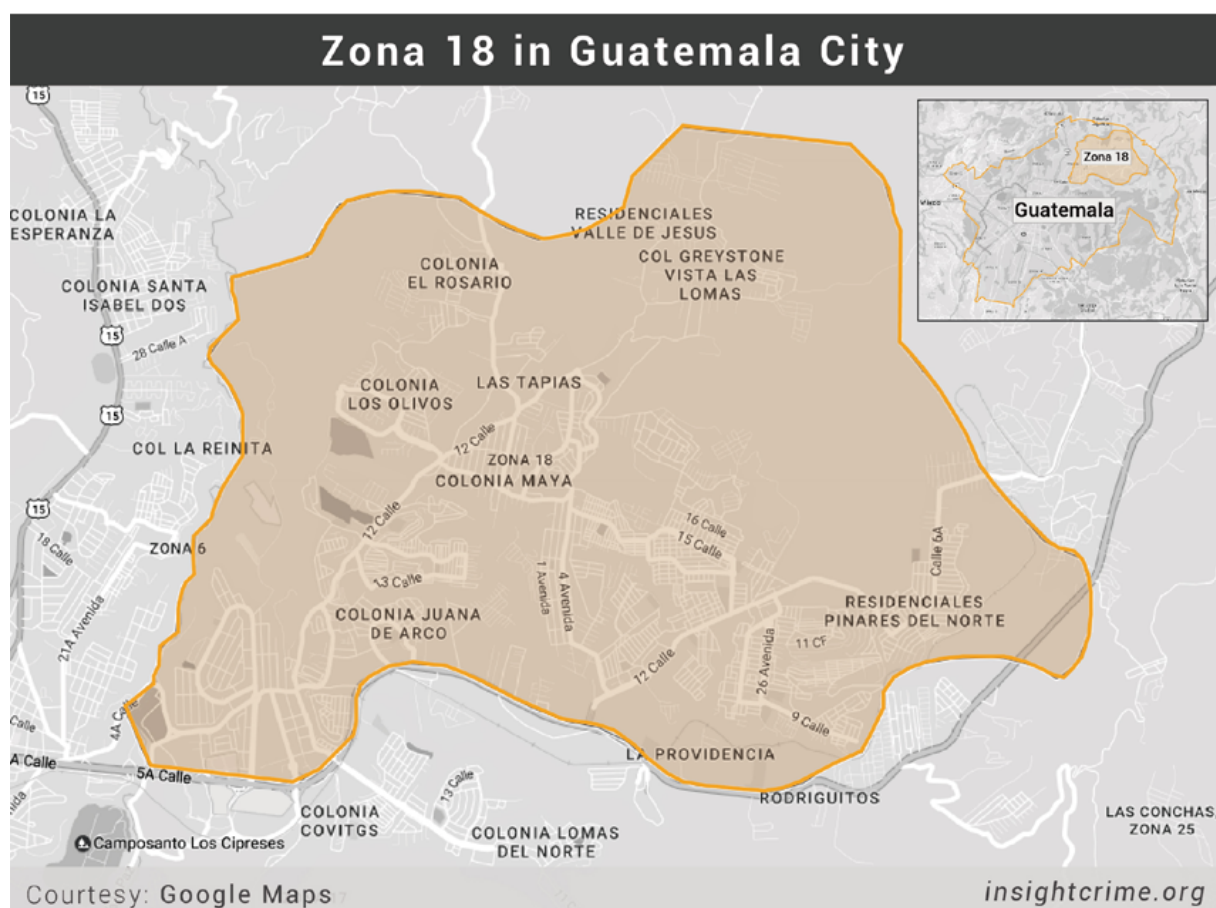


In sum, after analyzing two years of reports, a complex picture emerged from Chiquimula more akin to the complexities we see throughout the region. While there is a considerable number of homicides that appear related to organized crime, there is also a large number that is not. Perhaps the most important takeaway is that there remains a sizeable portion of cases in which we simply cannot determine motive or actor. A similar conclusion can be drawn from looking at a more urban, gang-controlled area, as we do in the next section.

Analysis of the Homicides in Zona 18

With over 300,000 residents, Zona 18 is one of Guatemala's most densely populated areas. It is also one of its poorest and most violent. Located on the northern tip of the city, the neighborhood has a plethora of criminal activity. Both street gangs and more organized criminal groups operate in the area. All criminal organizations benefit from the tight spaces in which the local population and security forces have to operate, controlling entry and exit points for the multiple micro-neighborhoods, or "colonias," as they are known, that make up the area. They also benefit from the direct access to rural areas, adjoining municipalities, and two of the city's main north-south thoroughfares that lead out of the city to important hubs. (See Map 3)

Map 3

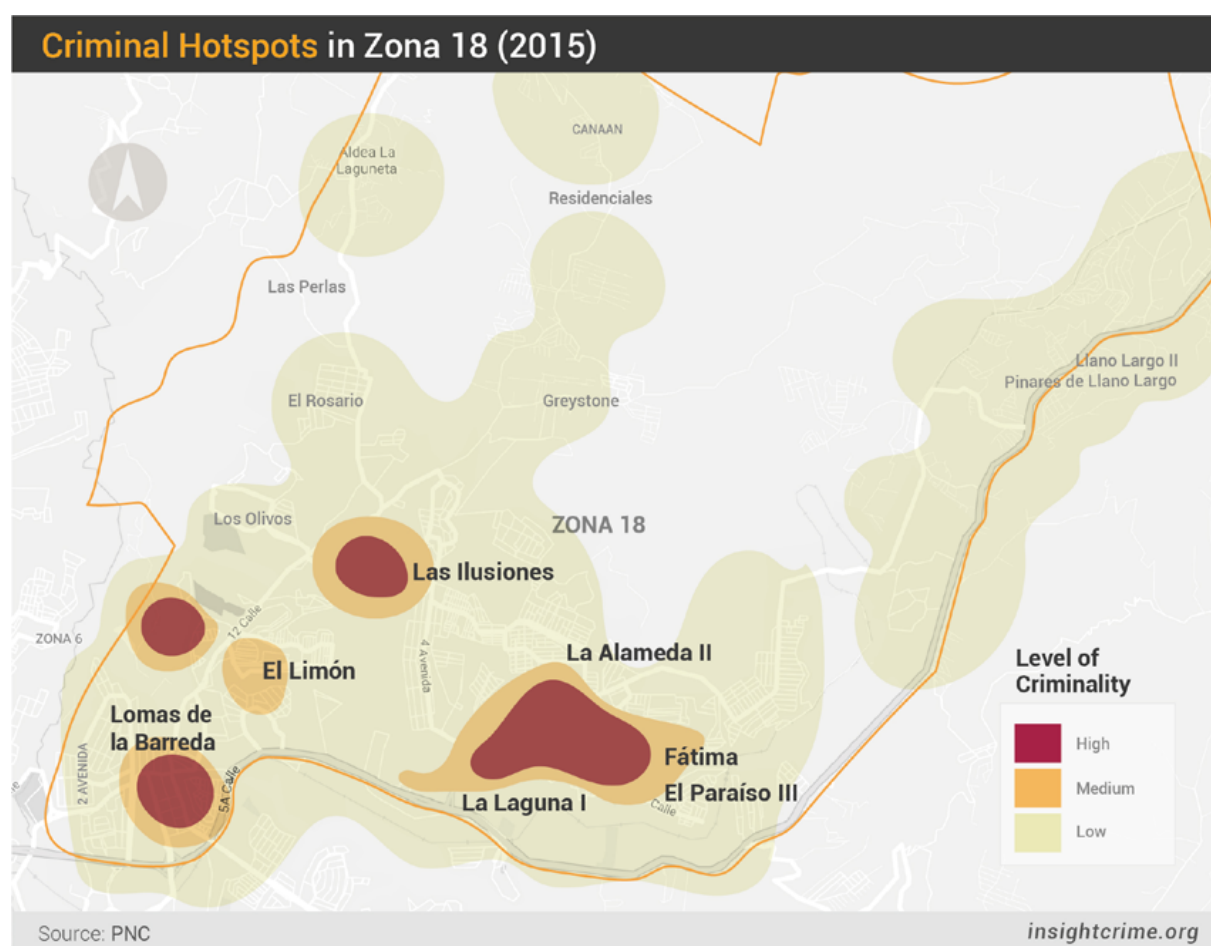


The country's two main gangs, the Barrio 18 and the Mara Salvatrucha (MS13), both operate in the Zona 18, although Barrio 18 controls far more territory, police sources said. Both gangs' criminal revenues center on extortion and petty drug dealing. They are both highly territorial, and are known to attack and kill for the simplest transgressions or perceived slights.

The current boundaries established between the gangs are fairly static. And the areas of highest contention between them appear to relate to bus routes, commercial areas, or highly trafficked drug distribution points. To cite but one example of why this is so important, the police say that income from extorting just one bus route in the neighborhood known as Maya can reach \$1,000 per month; there are dozens of bus routes that go through the neighborhood.

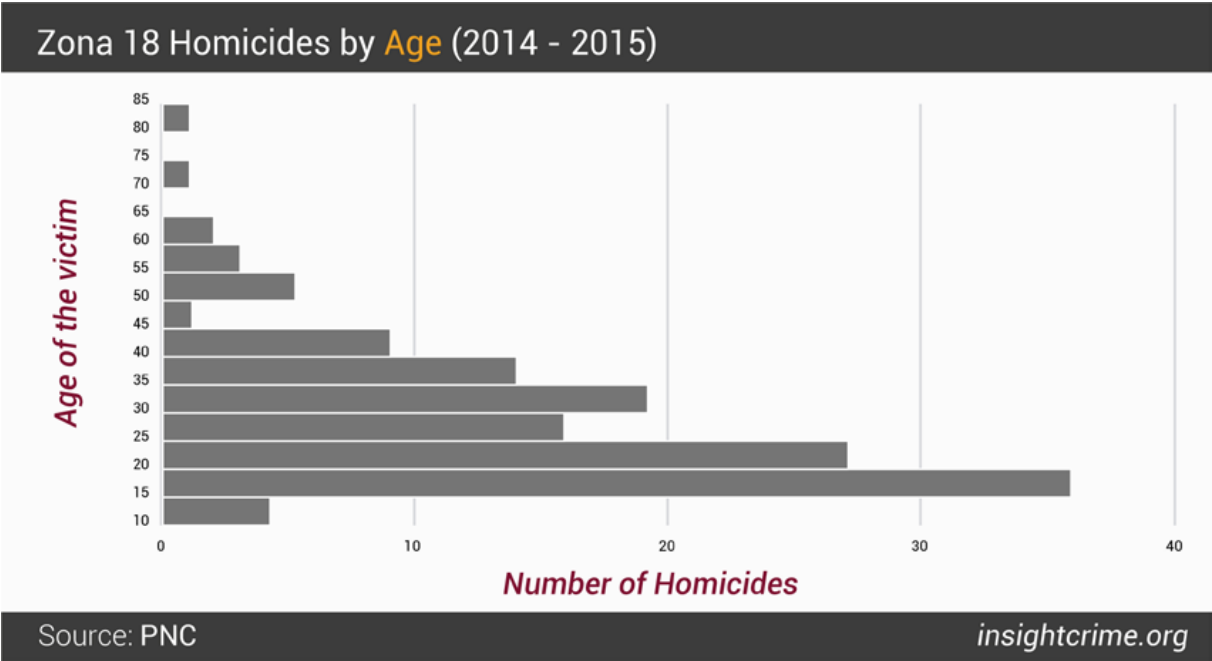
The area hardest hit during 2014 - 2015 were the Colonias San Rafael, El Limón, Maya and the Paraisos (Paraiso I and Paraiso II), according to the police preliminary homicide report data we compiled. (*See Map 4*) These are well transited areas with commercial activity and where bus services pass. These hotspots remain remarkably steady from year to year, the police and MP say, but it's harder to discern patterns when you study the homicides case by case.

Map 4



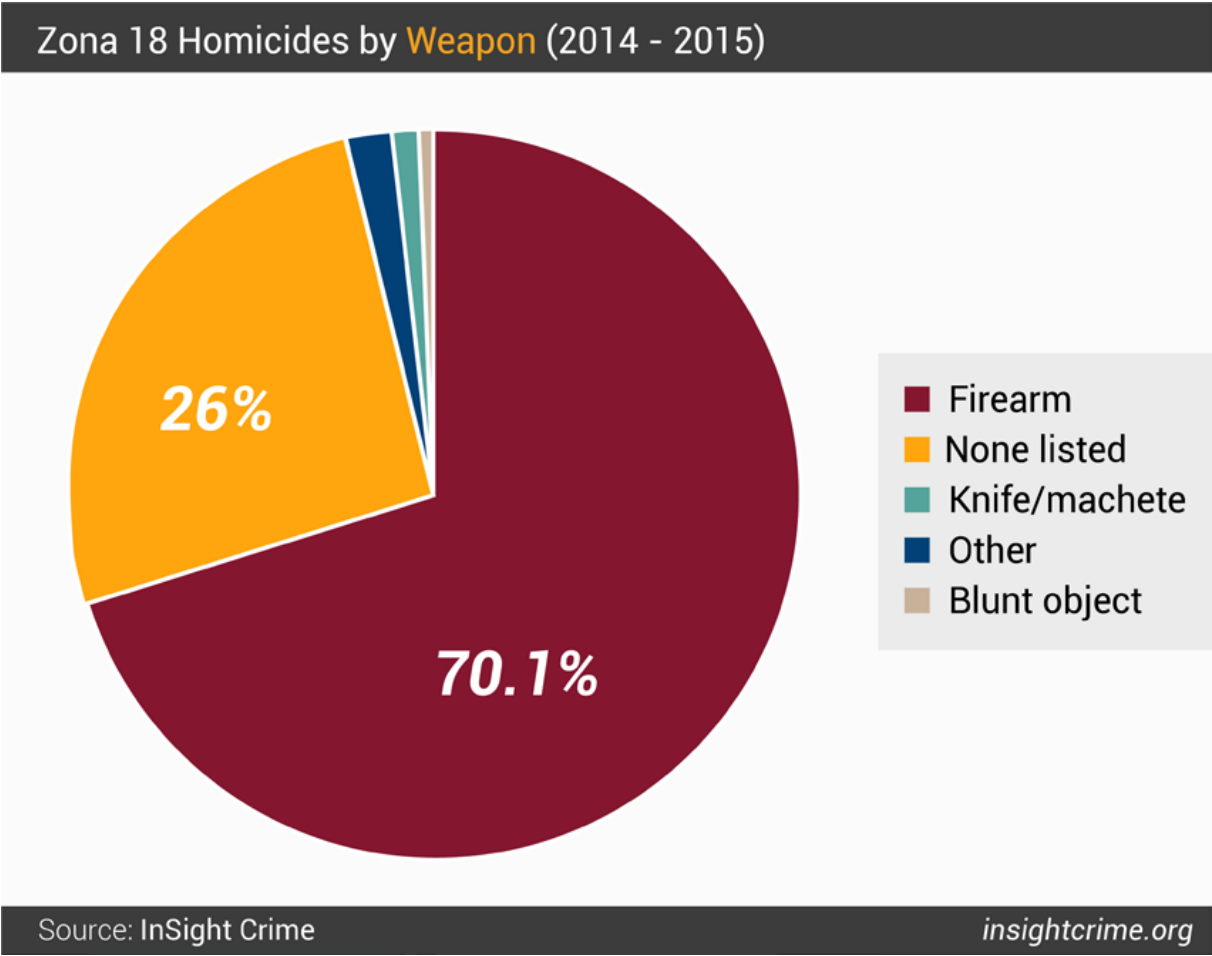
The average age of the homicide victim in Zona 18 was 28, according to the police data, considerably less than in Chiquimula. The age of gang-related homicide victims, as determined by our analysis of the police homicide data, was 24. (See Figure 5) This corresponds to what officials say about gang victims and gang members themselves, who are frequently the victims in these homicides. The differences in age speak to the very different dynamics of the violence in these two places.

Figure 5



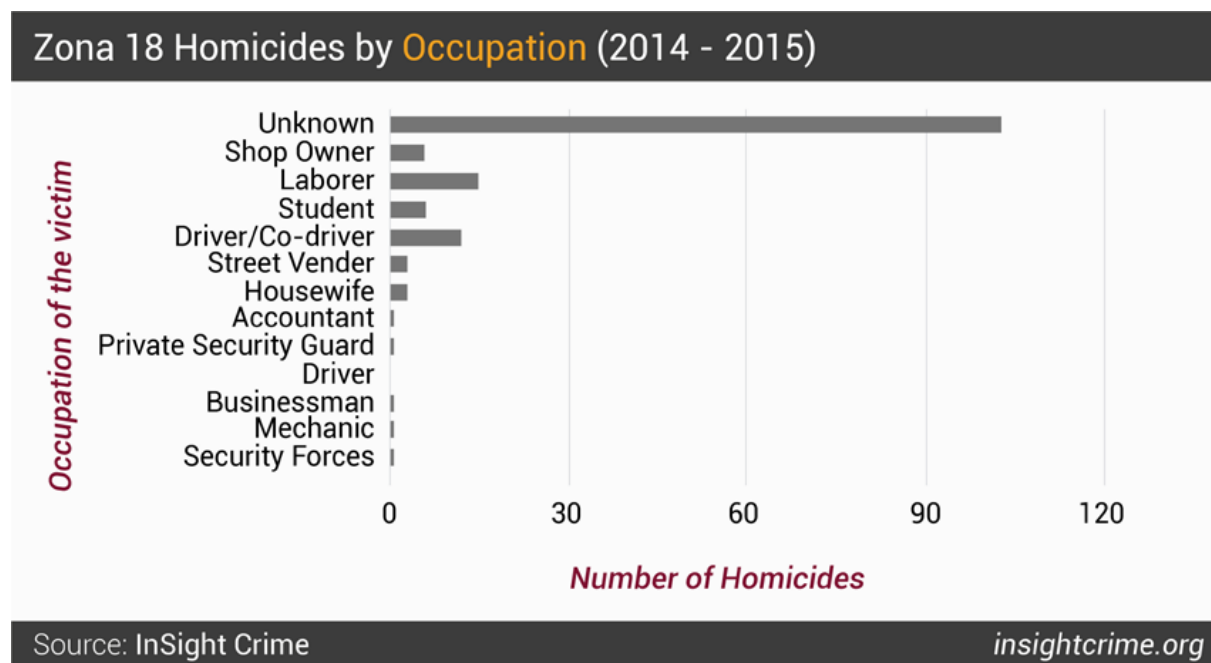
The weapons used to commit these murders is consistent with national statistics: 70 percent of the murders were committed with a firearm in Zona 18, according to the preliminary police data. (See Figure 6) When it comes to potential gang-related homicides, this number goes up to 86 percent. There was a high number of “unknown” weapons. This could, in part, be related to the fact that some Zona 18 murders that happen inside of the local prison are also appear in the police preliminary reports. These jailhouse murders are mostly committed using makeshift weapons, not firearms.

Figure 6



In terms of occupation of the victims, there is no discernable pattern and a very large number of “unknown.” The highest number of victims were drivers but these were a mix of taxi drivers, tuc tuc^{1*} drivers and others such as a propane gas truck driver. Taxi drivers and tuc tuc drivers are known to work as lookouts for the gangs, but we could only attribute three of these homicide cases, out of 12, to being possibly gang-related. (See Figure 7)

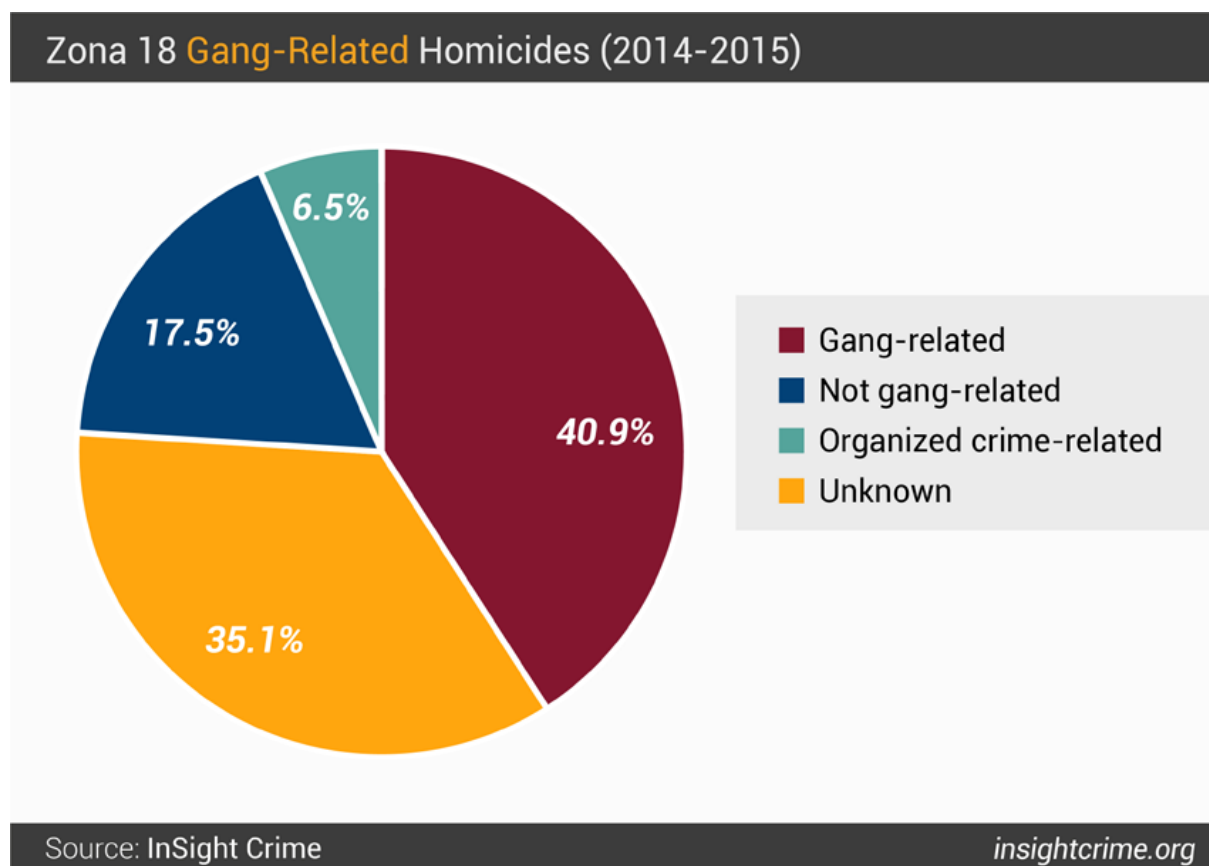
Figure 7



In total, using responding officers’ reports and media reports,⁴² we determined that 63 of the 154 homicides for which we found preliminary police reports during 2014 - 2015 period in Zona 18, or 41 percent, were possibly gang-related; 27 cases were not gang-related; 10 cases we attributed to organized crime; 54 cases were unknown. (See Figure 8)

^{1*} Tuc tuc is the Latin America version of the Thai Tuk-tuk -- the small, mostly three-wheeled vehicles that have limited range and operate as taxis in city neighborhoods or small rural towns

Figure 8



This is in line with what the MP says. In interviews with InSight Crime, analysts from the prosecutors' office attributed approximately 40 percent of the homicide cases in gang areas to gang activity. They cited the motives such as "vendettas," "extortion" and "hitmen for hire" ("sicariato"). For their part, the police did not put a percentage on the number of homicides attributed to gang-activity in the area, but they cited the following motives, which are line with gang activity: vendettas for selling drugs or extorting in "enemy territory," or pocketing extortion money that should be going to the boss or others. There were so many recent homicides linked to extortions that in 2015, the MP created a sub-unit within the homicide unit dedicated exclusively to extortion-related cases.

Of these motives, vendettas and sicariato are the most common explanations used by officials. They are both potentially gang-related, since it is supposedly the gangs who are committing the murders. But both could also refer to the gangs lending their services to others for reasons that have nothing to do with gang activity; or internal disputes within or between the gangs that have little or nothing to do with gang activity. In both cases, more details are needed to better determine how these relate to gang activities, if at all. As it is with organized crime-related murders, there would also have to be the determination of whether to place homicides that are committed by gang members, but are not related to their gang activities, in the category of gang-related murders.

The recruitment of minors to be used as hitmen is a trend, officials said, in part because the penalty for murder for minors are far below those of adults. When caught, minors receive a maximum sentence of six years in prison, according to the Guatemalan law. In July 2015, for instance, a 17-year-old was arrested for shooting and killing two female victims. The minor was in his fourth month of a two-year probation period for possessing an illegal weapon. In March 2016, he was convicted of murder and sentenced to six years in prison. The trial for the second murder is still pending, but his maximum sentence regardless will remain six years.⁴³

Whichever gang controls a particular area has some effect on homicides, officials said. The MS13 is known as a slightly more “respectful” organization, less prone to violence. This is largely anecdotal but could impact the violence levels in places like Zona 18, where the gang activity is dominated by the Barrio 18. The officials said, for instance, that the total number of cases dropped in 2015, following several arrests of important members of the Barrio 18. For its part, the MP analysts noted the Limón neighborhood, where sicariato was most common, is a Barrio 18 neighborhood. Other crime-prone areas are Los Paraísos, Alamedas and San Rafael neighborhoods, as well as Las Ilusiones, according to a Precinct 12 official, which are all Barrio 18-controlled.

Perhaps the most alarming statistic from the preliminary police reports of Zona 18 was that 26 percent of the presumed gang-related victims were female.

Perhaps the most alarming statistic from the preliminary police reports of Zona 18 was that 26 percent of the presumed gang-related victims were female, much higher than the national average of 11 percent.⁴⁴ MP representatives say they have noticed a steady increase in the forced recruitment of women in gangs, which accounts for an increase in the arrest of female gang members and the number of homicide cases involving women. The MP says it is closely studying female victims in these cases to see if it can determine the reasons behind these differences but did not offer any preliminary conclusions.

The MP attributed the remaining 60 percent of the homicide cases to domestic violence, or street brawls, among other social or domestic reasons. Our count slightly differs with theirs on this point: there were a number of homicides we could reasonably attribute to organized crime. This speaks to mixture of criminal activity in Zona 18, and the need to differentiate between the two criminal organizations. The officials did not mention this as a factor in Zona 18, but that could be because the gangs themselves are copying organized crime modus operandi and officials were not distinguishing between gang-related and organized crime-related murders. To be sure, the preferred method in these organized crime-related homicides is to use a firearm, but police told InSight Crime that some victims had been dismembered as well, usually as a message for someone else in a rival group or to scare potential or actual victims. In analyzing cases where bodies were dismembered or corpses were wrapped in plastic or other materials, InSight Crime has attributed these deaths to organized crime, but there may be some overlap here with gang-related murders and more

investigation is needed to determine with greater precision whether the gangs are indeed adopting organized crime techniques.

As it is in Chiquimula, fear and threats impact the investigations in these urban areas. In February 2014, an MP analyst had to leave the country and request asylum in another country due to the threats the person received from gang members after testifying in court. The MP reports this case is not an exception. One attorney pointed out the difficulty in investigating cases due to witnesses' reluctance to talk for fear of reprisals in the form of direct threats, or an attempt against their life. As a result, the MP has tried to rely less on witness testimonies, and more on scientific evidence. It has also adopted the habit of getting sworn testimony before a judge well before the trial (what is known as a "declaración como anticipo de prueba"), because witnesses are known to abscond come trial time. These testimonies are kept in a sealed file but are still valid for the case.

The picture that emerged from Zona 18 was one in which gang violence was a main, if not the main driver of homicides.

In sum, the picture that emerged from Zona 18 was one in which gang violence was a main, if not the main driver of homicides. That overlaps with what authorities claim. Still, as it was in Chiquimula, we have a large grey area, one in which we cannot determine with any precision whatsoever the actors or motives behind the violence. This troubling trend is directly related to the way in which authorities deal with the information that they gather to investigate the homicide cases, a subject we tackle in the next section.



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

PART II

Collecting the Data

When someone is murdered in Guatemala, police, forensic doctors and government prosecutors start making their way to the crime scene and a creaky, antiquated 20th Century bureaucratic machine kicks into gear. Calls are made. Forms are filled out by hand or typed into computers or both. Some of these forms go into paper files. Others go into computer files. Some of them are summarized and sent to headquarters. Others remain at precinct or even sub-precinct level. As will become evident, much of it is quickly buried amidst a pile of papers that will literally fade with time, or within a computer file, which will most likely be erased or lost by the next person who has that job.

Most of those involved do not question the system that processes these cases. They are boxes to check off in a day full of seemingly meaningless tasks that lead to little real results as it relates to the investigations of these homicides. The impunity rate for homicides in Guatemala is near 95 percent, according to International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala - CICIG).⁴⁵ The fruitlessness of this exercise is palpable inside these processing offices where papers are routinely lost, computer files are destroyed or erased, and file cabinets, instead of being tidy and dust free, are filled with tabasco and soy sauce.

From the outside looking in, the way this information is processed has its logic. There are rules, which are seemingly followed, about who receives the information and how it should be archived or passed on to other entities. In this sense, the system works. But there is a tremendous amount of information that is lost along the way. And the inability of the police and the MP to create a unified database so that they can better analyze this information could be inhibiting their ability to solve more crimes and analyze crime patterns.

In order to help understand how this system works, where there are major interruptions, gaps and outright failures, we broke the system down piece by piece, with a special focus on police information and data, since that is where we had the greatest access. We also visited

each part of the chain of communication and have poured through hundreds of pages of the actual reports. Below is a step-by-step illustration of this process (See Figure 9), followed by a more detailed account, and the problems associated with each step. Its primary focus was regarding information the police obtained and processed, but it includes elements of information collection in other institutions, principally the MP at the investigative stage.

Figure 9

Data Flow from the Crime Scene to the Statistics Books

Phase I: The Crime Scene

- 1a. Emergency call made to 110 hotline; or
- 1b. Emergency call made to precinct; camera in area picks up crime
2. Call center directs information to local precinct
First piece of data generated: preliminary report of emergency call
3. Local precinct directs police/INACIF/MP to crime scene
4. MP, Police, INACIF work the crime scene



Phase II: The Investigation

5a. Police write up preliminary crime scene report

This is a key piece of data that could be used to:

- Assist in the investigation
- Help understand criminal dynamics

However, it is underappreciated and lost in the process

5b. Coroner inspects body, evidence

Two or more reports can come from this:

- Autopsy
- Ballistics

Both make their way in paper form to the MP

5c. MP gathers evidence, generates more information

The prosecutor builds the case file that has both paper and digital files:

- **Paper:** police crime scene report; autopsy; ballistics; photographic evidence; etc.
- **Digital:** interviews with witnesses; memos to judges and other functionaries

The bifurcated system means mountains of information cannot be analyzed or cross-referenced



Phase III: The Statistics

6. PNC sends summaries to headquarters - these arrive as emails or faxes; does not include key data from crime scene investigation

7. PNC receives information, divides cases up by motive

Personnel is poorly trained or untrained in data entry, management or analysis, so the results are nearly meaningless

8. PNC holds weekly meeting (in person) in the HQ to cross-check data

Time and resources lost because of this process

Phase I: The Crime Scene

(1a) Call center 110 hotline, at National Civilian Police (PNC) headquarters, receives emergency calls.

When someone is murdered in Guatemala, the normal way for this information to arrive to the police is by calling 1-1-0. This goes to a call center. The operator there collects information from the caller and radios or calls operators responsible for receiving information for the precinct in which the murder occurred. There are 26 precincts in Guatemala.

InSight Crime found that working conditions are lacking at the call center and the office space for operators assigned to each precinct. Close to half of the police officers receiving calls, dispatching police units to crime scenes, or covering other citizen security emergencies, work in an office space with no windows or ventilation and poor light.

The head of the 110 call center supervises the office from a work space with three desks (two of them for the assistants), enclosed by glass. Neither the lights or the air conditioning were working when we visited. The office manager told InSight Crime that the office has no budget for these repairs.

This impacts performance. The heat is nearly unbearable. What's more, the only light in the supervisor's office comes from the computer screens and an oversized monitor where they record the preliminary stats of the day per department from different parts of the country.

(1b) Precincts can also receive information directly and send a unit to the crime scene.

There are two ways precincts can receive information directly: cameras in the precinct's district (when available) alert the police to crimes in progress; or people can call the precinct's direct emergency line. Once the precinct operator receives the call, the operator dispatches a unit to the crime scene. The security cameras, however, are monitored by police, who dispatch units from the closest police sub-station or patrol station when they observe a crime.

Unfortunately, the camera system for Zona 18, one of the most crime-ridden and homicidal areas in the country, is no longer working. In 2013, the Interior Ministry hired a private company to install the cameras and feed the footage to a control room in Precinct 12. According to an officer from the precinct, 60 police officers -- rotating in teams of 20 -- manned the control room 24 hours a day.

However, in October 2015, the company providing the service ceased to provide the camera footage or the signal to the control room because the ministry stopped paying for the service.⁴⁶ In March 2016, President Jimmy Morales re-inaugurated the control room, but four months later, the cameras are still not operational and all 60 officers that were assigned to monitoring were reassigned to regular patrol units in other precincts around

the country. The control room sits empty, except for the oversized TV monitors, desks and chairs arranged in a semi-circle. The room still runs its air conditioner and is lit all day in case someone wants to use it for a meeting.

(2) From the call center, the information is sent to an operator in charge of precinct closest to crime scene.

At PNC headquarters, there are teams of operators per each police precinct. Once the 110 operator registers the exact location of the crime scene, the operator sends the information to an operator of the corresponding precinct via telephone or radio. The precinct operator dispatches a police unit to the crime scene. The operators assigned to each precinct are familiar with the area that the precinct covers and are better able to direct the police unit to the crime scene location.

Each operator then generates the first piece of data: a preliminary report of emergencies covered throughout the day. It's preliminary because, for instance, they might report that a person was wounded in a shootout, but if, by the end of the day, the victim dies, the official police report must update this information to reflect that it became a homicide. If, however, the victim dies two or more days later, the police statistics will not reflect it as a homicide. In contrast, this will be registered by the Attorney General's Office (Ministerio Público - MP) and the coroner's office (Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses - INACIF) as a homicide.

The discrepancies between the numbers of homicides registered by these institutions does not end there. Police are also known to register homicides as suicides or drownings. This is due to lack of information at the scene of the crime, poor training, inexperience, or corruption. INACIF and the MP will later change these designations, but they will not be changed in the police data. The differences in how these entities register data leads to strange year-end statistical anomalies in which the police will register more homicides than the MP in some areas and less in others.

(3) Operator dispatches a police unit from corresponding precinct to the crime scene.

The police cordons off the crime scene and looks for evidence, which includes footage from surveillance cameras, bullet fragments and/or shell casings, personal items belonging to the perpetrator or victim. The police also interview the victim's relatives, if there are any present, as well as neighbors or potential witnesses.

Cordoning off the area is important because, in some cases, the prosecutor can take several hours to get to the crime scene. According to an official at the MP in Guatemala City, this is due to a lack of resources: the MP often has but one evidence collection unit per zone or jurisdiction. If a homicide is reported in one area, and another is reported at the opposite extreme of the jurisdiction, there can be long lag time between crime scene sweeps. Add even more time if there is traffic.

Police also have trouble getting to crime scenes. This is, in part, due to lack of functional vehicles. Nationwide, of 4,500 patrol vehicles, only 500 are in working condition.⁴⁷ This is related to the large and complicated geographic areas they often have to cover. For instance, Precinct 12 (Comisaría 12), the area we chose to do our case study since it covers Zona 18, covers five of what are called zones in Guatemala City (6, 17, 18, 24, 25), and two counties outside of the city (San Pedro Ayampuc and San José El Golfo). The topography of the area sometimes makes it difficult to reach a crime scene quickly, reach suspects or potential witnesses, due to the distance and radius that they need to cover.

Precinct 12 has 1,080 police, of which approximately 900 are on duty (the rest are on leave) divided in shifts of 150 each, and distributed among the precinct and 17 substations and patrolling stations. The precinct has 61 police patrol vehicles and 31 motorcycles, as well as 33 bicycles. According to the precinct's chief, of the 92 vehicles and motorcycles it has, 31 were not working when we visited the precinct in May 2016, due to lack of funds to repair them and purchase spare parts. The vehicles that work are assigned a maximum of seven gallons of fuel per day. Until January 2016, they were assigned only two gallons per day.

These vehicles are used for operational and bureaucratic purposes. Since internet service is so poor on the precinct level, for example, the 12th Precinct often uses a vehicle to hand deliver correspondence or paper versions of the daily crime reports, among other things.

In the municipality of Chiquimula (of the department that carries the same name), our other case study area, the situation is worse. Officials say one third of the vehicles need repairs.

(4) MP instructs PNC to identify physical evidence, collect witness interviews, security camera footage.

The prosecutor arrives at the scene with a crime scene analysis unit, checks the evidence located by the police, and further scans the area for more findings. The prosecutor also conducts interviews with witnesses. MP representatives told InSight Crime they do not trust information given to the police, particularly to those in uniform. This lack of trust, MP personnel told us, is related to the long-standing reputation the police have for being compromised and corrupted, especially in high crime areas where we focused our research. Thus, the MP claims to conduct their own interviews in the field. However, files at the MP shows that the MP relies heavily on interviews conducted by police detectives from the Criminal Investigation Specialized Division (División Especializada en Investigación Criminal - DEIC), police testimonies collected at the crime scene, and information gathered by the police during the course of the investigation.

After they finish their initial inspection and interviews, the MP authorizes the transportation of the deceased body to the morgue for an exam by the coroner's office (INACIF), as well as the collection and processing of all evidence.

Phase II: The Investigation

(5a) PNC writes a crime report.

Upon leaving the scene, the PNC generates its second piece of data in the form of preliminary crime reports. Over time, these reports have improved. What used to be scratched out by hand by a police officer is now typed into a computer by someone known as the oficinista, whose primary task it is to enter this information into the computer in a more concerted manner. If that person is not available, then the responding office may do this job. If there is no computer, then the responding officer will write the report by hand. If the responding officer does not have time to come back to the precinct or substation, the information is given over the phone. But in all cases, a general format is followed.

The first part of that format is a general description of the events, as the responding officer understands them. This always includes who were the responding officers, the representatives of the MP and INACIF. It often includes vital data about the cars that were seen in the area, license plates, cameras in the area, and other information that could be critical in solving the case. Secondly, the responding officer gives all of the information obtained about the victim, including address, ID and other identifying features such as what the victim looks like, what the victim was wearing, etc. Third, the responding officer gives information about the crime scene itself: where the body was found, what injuries are clearly visible, the evidence that was found, and the potential cause of death. Fourth, the responding officer gives an overview of the interviews that were done on the scene. Finally, the responding officer can offer a “preliminary investigation” and even a hypothesis regarding the case.

The report is printed and several copies are made. One copy goes to a local file, another to the prosecutor, and another to PNC headquarters. This should be easy, except it is not. Precinct 12, like many others, does not have internet. (The precinct’s chief also does not

The utility of this preliminary report has been questioned inside the system. Many police think it is just paperwork, an exercise in futility.

have a computer on his desk; he has to use one in any of the other offices.) This makes each computer in the precinct basically an island. The information is generally stored haphazardly either on a hard disk or on a USB drive, which is then moved often moved to another computer to print.

The paper filing system also does not follow any clear pattern. In the two precincts where we did our research, the files were mixed up and stuffed into whatever space was available in seemingly completely random fashion.

In Precinct 12, this included having files on two different floors of the same precinct. In Chiquimula, the files were stuffed in no particular order into a closet with shelves that were dusty and rotting.

The utility of this preliminary report has been questioned inside the system. Many police think it is just paperwork, an exercise in futility. And one prosecutor told InSight Crime they are “useless” for the criminal investigation because the prosecutors conduct their own investigations.

However, some disagree with this assessment, including those of us who have gone through hundreds of these reports.⁴⁸ One police official in headquarters told InSight Crime the reports are used as backup for police detectives investigating the case, usually at the request of the Attorney General's Office or the prosecutor. And a high level Interior Ministry official said that the information could be used for multiple purposes, not just the crime scene investigation. This includes using it for analyzing the dynamics of the violence as well as better understanding criminal groups in those areas.

*"Everything is in there," the official said.
"Everything. We could analyze modus operandi,
type of victims, the type of criminals. We could
understand a ton about criminal dynamics."*

In addition to the information that is ignored regarding criminal dynamics, the report represents a tremendous amount of time and effort towards resolving the case. This includes names of witnesses, if there were cameras in the area, makes and models of cars, as well as license plates, etc. But that too appears to be lost or go unused for several reasons. To begin with, if either the hard disk or the USB are damaged on which the information is stored, the report's electronic edition might be lost forever.

This is not conjecture. In both Precinct 12 and Chiquimula, police responsible for this information were unable to produce it in digital form. In Precinct 12, they said this was because the old computer that stored the information had gotten a virus and all the information was destroyed with the purge of the system that followed. In Chiquimula, they said there was a tradition of erasing whatever your predecessor had left on the computer that was designated to you. Even worse, in some places they simply write one report over the other.

"I am sure they write the report, then print it and file it," said the ministry official, who worked for years trying to unify and utilize the data from the various crime-fighting agencies. "The next report they will simply write it in the same document as if it were a rough draft. And then they print that and file it. And then the next one they just write right on top of that one."

It was not just the digital version that was at risk. The printed material was also lost in some cases. InSight Crime researchers poured through file cabinets, closets, and plastic and paper boxes trying to find all the crime reports for the various precincts and substations in Zona 18 for the period between 2013 and 2015, without success. The police on hand said that the folders had been misplaced when they moved from one office to another. In Chiquimula, the folders were buried in a back closet, mixed with folders from up to a decade earlier, which InSight Crime had to fish out and thumb through (with the help, it should be noted, of two very dutiful and diligent oficinistas).

But even finding the printed material does not insure that the information is safe. Some substations that are part of Precinct 12 fax the reports to the head precinct office. Copies are also often generated at the substation level using carbon paper. Both fax copies and carbon paper copies fade with time, especially when they are being stored in hot, dusty, enclosed areas.

One master copy of the report is sent to the PNC headquarters, but if this good copy is lost, and the other copies of the reports are on fax or carbon paper, there is a good chance the information will be lost forever. The police have tried to resolve these issues in various ways. One officer said that Precinct 12 received a donation of scanners to cut down on printing documents and expedite sending documents via email. However, the scanners are designed for documents letter-sized, and most of their documents are legal, so the scanners are useless for the most part. They also do not have money to maintain printers.

(5b) The coroner inspects the body to determine the cause of death and generates a report.

The coroner inspects the body and corresponding evidence. If the body was found wrapped in any kind of material, for instance, it will be transported as such, and the first ones to examine it will be INACIF analysts. INACIF is also responsible for ballistics. If a gun was found, they can determine whether the shell casings found in the body were fired by the same gun, or if the victim was cut with a blade found on a suspect or at the crime scene.

The coroner generates a report regarding the cause of death. This report can possibly confirm whether or not there is a match between evidence found at the crime scene and wounds inflicted on the victim. Ballistics evidence that is gathered makes for an additional report. All reports are sent in physical form to the prosecutor.

(5c) The prosecutor begins gathering, generating information.

The prosecutor in the case begins to build the case file. That case file is in both digital and paper form. All of the reports generated before this process begins, including photos taken at the scene of the crime, the responding officer's crime scene report and the INACIF autopsy, are in paper form and go in the physical file. Other reports, such as whatever comes from the ballistics exam (INACIF), the arms registry database (DIGICAM), the identity database (RENAP), the police's investigative unit (DEIC), also fill the physical file. The prosecutor has to request this data, and there are often long delays.

For the digital files, the MP uses a program called the Integrated Case System (Sistema Integrado de Casos - SICOM). It is filled with interviews that the prosecutor does with witnesses and others such as the MP analyst (although sometimes this analysis also comes in paper form), requests for information from other agencies (such as those from DIGICAM and RENAP), requests and memos to the judge, arrest orders and other bureaucratic matters.

The end result is a bifurcated system of gathering information, some of which is in paper form and some of which is in digital form, despite the fact that nearly everything is generated on a computer. (See Table 4) Put bluntly, it makes no sense that this information cannot be sent over in digital form and put into same digital folder. This database could be a treasure-trove of information for prosecutors. However, prosecutors and their bosses worry about space in the computers, the availability of the computers, and the vulnerability of the computers, among other concerns.

Table 4

Bifurcated Case File	
Paper File	SICOM
Preliminary police report	MP's initial report, hypothesis
INACIF autopsy	MP interviews
RENAP - ID	Memorandums, requests for information
INACIF - Ballistics report	MP analyst's report
MP, INACIF - Photographic evidence	Arrest orders
DIGICAM - Weapons registry report	
Source: MP insightcrime.org	

In the end, a lot of information that is gathered for the case file is never analyzed or used in any other matter and is effectively lost. “There is a lot of information in those case files that is not related to the actual crime but that would help us understand criminal dynamics in a strategic way, and that information is lost,” the ministry official said. “It is there, and we don’t use it.”

The reasons why this happens are complex, but at the heart of the issue is the question of what gets priority. In the political world, it is the macro-, and not the micro-data that matters. This is evident in the amount of resources put towards the next phase of the process: collecting statistics for the police.

Phase III: The Statistics

(6) PNC precinct sends daily print and e-summary reports to PNC headquarters.

The precincts are required to send print copies of all these homicide reports to PNC headquarters every day. Precinct 12 has a messenger per shift who every day takes reports from the previous day on a motorcycle, except when the motorcycle is broken or there are other logistical problems.⁴⁹ In 2015, for instance, one of the messengers was shot four times when he was on his way to the PNC headquarters to deliver correspondence. When there is no messenger or a working motorcycle for the messenger to use, the chief of the precinct takes a police car and delivers the reports in person, a process that can easily take up to four hours depending on traffic. And those are four hours during which the precinct has one less patrol vehicle to respond to emergencies.

The precincts also generate what they call e-summaries, which are usually paragraph long summaries of crime events, which are sent every day at 6 a.m. by email or fax, depending on internet capabilities, to PNC command, as well as to the Interior Ministry. These shortened versions, known as *circunstanciados*,⁵⁰ are the only thing that remain in digital form, if they arrive via email. But they do not include critical information obtained at the scene, including suspected vehicle descriptions, license plate numbers, relatives' and witnesses' names and addresses, potential suspects, means of homicide, *modus operandi* of the victimizer or assassins, preliminary hypothesis, etc.

"The information they are worried about is what the boss needs at that very moment," the ministry official said. "And the other information regarding the crime (or what would assist with understanding criminal dynamics) is left to the side."

(7) PNC statistics office receives summaries, divides cases up by possible motive.

In addition to sending the summaries to the PNC command and the Ministry of the Interior, the precincts also send the *circunstanciados* to the Latest News (*Sección de Novedades*) on the first floor of the PNC headquarters by fax or email. *Novedades* prints the reports or copies the faxes and brings the printed version to the statistics office. The statistics office puts the data in various Excel databases.

The statistics office has seven different databases. One is used for all arrests for different motives countrywide. Another is used for homicides and victims who were wounded (by firearm, objects with blades, car accidents, etc.). These databases include information such as: date, address and municipality, time, name of the neighborhood or area, reference data, precinct in charge of protecting the crime scene; name, gender and age of victim, type of crime committed, and cause of death. Other computers are used for databases on stolen or recovered property, and other crimes (rape, kidnapping, extortion, etc.). These databases are divided between "positive events" and "negative events." The former refer to recovery

of property (stolen vehicles, or personal belongings), or rescued victims of kidnapping, or seizure of illicit drugs or money, for instance. The latter refer to number of homicides, attempted homicides, extortion reports, etc.

This office registers homicide cases daily based on the preliminary information gathered at the scene by the police unit dispatched by the precinct operator. There is a margin of error here as the preliminary information may change during the police or the MP investigation. An office known as the Command for Planning Strategy and Institutional Development (Jefatura de Planificación Estratégica Desarrollo Institucional - JEPEDI) is in charge of classifying homicide cases in terms of preliminary motive. When we tried to understand homicide dynamics, this was our first stop.

The task is not easy, as is reflected in their data that we obtained from our Freedom of Information requests. To begin with, JEPEDI has been unable to decide on the categories for motive. Between 2012 and 2014, the police added and subtracted categories in a seemingly random fashion. In some cases, they repeat certain types of criminal acts (“kidnapping” and “victim of kidnapping,” for example). In other cases, their typology is so broad that it means nothing. The most important example in this regard is “personal vengeance” (“venganza personal”), a category that accounts for nearly half of the presumed motives across the board every year. (*See Table 5*)

Table 5

Police Homicide Motive Categories by Year		
2012	2013	2014
Stray Bullet	Stray Bullet	Stray Bullet
Offender	Offender	Offender
Argument/Dispute	Argument/Dispute	Argument/Dispute
Fulfillment of Duty	Fulfillment of Duty	Fulfillment of Duty
	Confrontation with PNC	Confrontation with PNC
Extortionist	Extortionist	Extortionist
Protest/Demonstration	Protest/Demonstration	
Drug Trafficking	Drug Trafficking	Drug Trafficking
Crime of Passion	Crime of Passion	Crime of Passion
Riot/Uprising		Riot/Uprising
Fight/Dispute	Fight/Dispute	Fight/Dispute
Rival Gangs	Rival Gangs	Rival Gangs
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Kidnapper		Kidnapper
		Drug Dealer
Victim of Extortion	Victim of Extortion	Victim of Extortion
		Victim of Robbery
		Child Abuse
Victim of Maras (MS13)	Victim of Maras (MS13)	Victim of Maras (MS13)
Kidnap Victim	Kidnap Victim	Kidnap Victim
Theft Victim	Theft Victim	Theft Victim
		Kidnap Victim
Victim of Rape	Victim of Rape	Victim of Rape
Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence
Personal Revenge	Personal Revenge	Personal Revenge
		Family Problems
Debt		
Victim of Attack		

*Note: colors denote changes from year to year

Source: PNC

insightcrime.org

There are many reasons for this haphazard system. To begin with, these are not trained analysts making these decisions. These are also not prized nor coveted positions. The conditions are poor, resources scarce and rewards minimal. There are no set guidelines for determining these categories and limited information available to make these decisions. There are frequent personnel shifts, and the categorization process is basically at the whim of the person who is making the designation or his commander. There are not any automated forms to ensure that the categories are labeled the same. There is no supervision, quality control or training.

The equipment in the statistics office is also outdated: they have only nine computers to process the information from the whole country, two of which were not operating when we visited because the memories were full. They do not have internet, so copies of electronic files must be handed to other sections using a memory stick. There are but five officers per shift who handle and input all the statistical information, as well as make the critical determination of motive.

However, they are not trained in systems or information analysis. According to one JEPEDI official, the only requirement for police personnel working in the statistics office is to be able to use Microsoft Office. This makes the categorization even less reliable. The ministry official called it, “pure speculation.” Training is critical since the entire police force depends on the statistics produced by the statistics office, particularly JEPEDI. The PNC, in essence, uses this information to determine its preventive strategies as well as identifying crime trends in each police jurisdiction.

“There is no understanding that this data helps us make decisions,” the Interior Ministry official said. “The only thing it is good for is to have an inventory of the crimes. That’s what we have: an inventory of crimes.”

What’s more, according to one JEPEDI officer, a great deal of time is spent cleaning the information of typos or inaccurate data. For instance, if a vehicle brand (in a car theft case,

for instance) is misspelled and written four different ways, this mistake will generate four different records and will appear as if there are four vehicles in question. The same applies to typos in names, or street numbers, and other critical identifying information that should be cross-checked. And, as illustrated above in the case of determining homicide motives, this lack of training and mistakes can affect also how homicides are analyzed, strategies are created, and resources deployed. In sum, the police are determining their strategy based on inadequate, incomplete, and/or incorrect data.

(8) PNC headquarters statistics office holds a meeting every Saturday with delegates from all precincts to corroborate the information sent previous week in print form or email.

Due to the fact that all the information is entered manually into the system from print reports, there is a large margin of error. To double check the information, the PNC has a meeting every Saturday in which each of the 26 precincts in the country sends a police vehicle and between one and three officers with the precinct's weekly statistics in print to PNC headquarters to corroborate the data.

The process takes all day, but leaves the police force without 26 vehicles for one or two days. For some precincts, such as the one in Petén, the ride to the capital alone can be as long as eight to ten hours depending on road and traffic conditions. The fuel costs also add up considering this process is done 52 times per year. The cross-reference meeting lasts between half an hour and an hour and a half, depending on how much data the precinct in question generates and the amount of criminal activity in its jurisdiction.

This step is necessary, but it does not reconcile differences with other agencies. Police statistics, for instance, are preliminary, and they do not do a follow-up investigation in the hours or days after the homicide occur. This explains why the police's numbers are often at odds with those from the MP and INACIF. While the police's homicide database is static, the MP's is updated in the days or weeks following the homicide. As stated earlier, the MP will register whether a victim, whom the police reported as wounded, died days later.

The statistics office has a digitalized inventory of crimes from 2001, when the system was created. Any information prior to 2001 has to be located at the corresponding precinct and is in paper form only. It should be noted, again, that precincts have poor filing systems, where even finding files from 2015 can be challenging. Precincts with large caseloads, such as Precinct 12, lack a proper filing system, as well as a server and digital records, officials told InSight Crime. More importantly, there is simply no culture in which this information has any value to them. This appears to be related to the priorities set by those in leadership positions.

Those priorities, of course, are related to the political priorities, which are related to the most immediate concerns of citizens. The easiest way to placate citizens is to increase physical presence of police. But more police do not resolve long-term issues related to gang and organized crime activities, or to social and economic problems.



AP Image / Rodrigo Abd

Conclusions

Olfato. It is a term used quite often in law enforcement and judicial circles in Central America (and other parts of the world as well). It refers to the sixth sense they have as they see a crime scene, investigate a murder or plow through the paperwork related to one. There is nothing scientific about *olfato*, yet it seems as if that is the guiding measure as it relates to determining this crucial question: what is behind the steady stream of homicides in Central America, or in this case, Guatemala.

In this study, we have tried to go beyond *olfato*. However, we too have run into extreme limitations and have had to rely on subjective measures, albeit slightly more consistent ones. And we do believe our work looking through each case gets us closer to understanding the dynamics of violence in Chiquimula and Zona 18, results that are the beginning of what we hope will be a slightly more analytic process in discerning these dynamics.

The importance of this exercise cannot be overstated. Without a clear understanding of the dynamics of homicides, local authorities and their international partners have a hard time developing clear strategies and effectively allocating resources.

Yet, the answer remains elusive, at least when we consider the limited data that we studied. Indeed, our first and arguably most important conclusion is that, given the high number of homicides that fall into the category of unknown, it is hard to say with any precision that the statements made by authorities about gang-related or drug trafficking-related homicides are incorrect.

But it is equally hard to say that they are correct. In fact, from this data and analysis, our preliminary conclusion as it relates to drug trafficking organizations – and even our slightly modified characterization “organized crime” – we can say the reality does correspond with the statements. Of course, this point would require more exploration, but what we can say from the data obtained in Chiquimula is that there are numerous homicides that are related to social and economic conflicts that have nothing to do with organized crime or drug trafficking. And only 28 percent of the cases could be reasonably attributed to organized crime.

The consistency with which homicides occur in places like Chiquimula also lends support to this thesis. Drug trafficking activities -- often measured by using proxies such as seizures -- vary widely from year to year. But homicides in these eastern states do not shift as readily as the patterns of the traffickers.

Meanwhile, gang violence, at least as it is expressed by statements of politicians and their counterparts in the police and the Attorney General's Office, is very close to what we discovered. In our study of Zona 18, we found that our analysis of the homicides coincided almost exactly with that of the MP's analysts (and that of President Otto Pérez Molina at the outset of this report).

Furthermore, our analysis of the motives also overlapped. The upshot is that we agree with the general perception that gang-activity is related to close to 40 percent of the homicides in these urban areas where the gangs are prevalent. Other factors such as age, type of weapon and presumed motives also coincide with the analysts' and police with whom we consulted.

What we do not know as it relates to gang violence is if this is the pattern in all gang-controlled areas. To be sure, the big question is whether we can extrapolate from this information. Unfortunately, we do not think it is. We studied two years. We would need to study more. And we would need to analyze more data from more geographic areas. We would also need to obtain more information from authorities. Preliminary information from the crime scene is but a snapshot. But given the high rates of impunity, and the fact that so few of these cases get any real attention, it is the single best source of raw information that we have.

Despite what some prosecutors say, there is a plethora of information provided in the crime scene report by the responding police officers.

What we can say with authority is that there are few homicides that are neatly packaged. The variety of victims, places, types of weapons, times of crimes, and modus operandi that we encountered made our task extremely difficult, which is probably why both the police and the MP mostly avoid this question altogether: in very few cases, can anyone give an answer with 100 percent certainty whether a homicide is drug trafficking-related or gang-related.

Nonetheless, there is a way to get closer to the answer without swerving into the political generalizations that service the presidents, security forces and others interested in painting an oversimplified picture. That is by improving the way that data is collected, organized and analyzed.

As noted in the second section on data collection, there is a mountain of information that is collected throughout the process. This information could be used for many purposes, beginning with the actual criminal investigation. Despite what some prosecutors say, there is a plethora of information provided in the crime scene report by the responding police officers. This information is quite simply underappreciated, and later, it is often lost. Only pieces of it, usually related to overall crime statistics gathering, remain. This is a huge loss.

There are also many ancillary uses for this information. For example, the police do some geospatial mapping of homicide hotspots, but this could be greatly enhanced. The police, for example, seem to have the information they need to do implement a basic form of CompStat.⁵¹ It could also be crossed with data emerging from the homicides themselves to test hypotheses about whether certain types of victims always appear in the same places or certain weapons are consistently used in the same areas.⁵²

It could also help to test correlations between rural murders -- by tracking, for example, the use of knives, machetes or blunt objects as the murder weapons -- and the presence of land disputes filed in the court system. A similar set of factors could be tested as they relate to organized crime- or gang-related homicides. The system could also be useful for cross-referencing suspects, victims, witnesses, cars, license plates, etc.

To date, the emphasis on the data gathering has been to satisfy a political appetite, to show that there is someone paying attention and, in the best case scenario, that these statistics are moving in a positive direction. But this is short-sighted and ignores the underlying issues that lead to this violence in the first place. Data is not a bureaucratic burden to be used for career advancement or political benefit. It is the core upon which strategies are made, resources are deployed and lives are saved.

Recommendations

1. Emphasize the need for information and data analysis that focuses on homicide dynamics. This analysis should be a prerequisite in any area where local and international stakeholders are investing heavily to lower homicide rates. The analysis should take into account the raw data from the crimes themselves, as well as the informed opinions and perceptions of security forces, investigators and others monitoring the situation closely.
2. Workshop the use and importance of crime-scene and other investigative information and data for the PNC, INACIF and the MP, so that there is understanding of how it is used to: a) resolve homicides; b) analyze criminal dynamics. There is little appreciation for a large amount of information gathered at the initial stages of the homicide investigations. In order for anyone to care about it, they need to better understand its utility.
3. Train and/or hire more data technicians in the police, INACIF and the MP. Focus efforts and money on getting people to better understand the collection, management, and analysis of the data so that not a single bit of it is wasted during any part of the process. There are some infrastructure issues that need to be addressed (see below), but the main issue is that there not a lot of specialists in this area who are trained to organize. The few specialists there are also appear to be underappreciated and underutilized.
4. Train more analysts. One of the most consistently cited ways to lower homicide rates is to obtain a better understanding of the dynamics of the area in question. The MP has started this process of creating a team of analysts. The police needs to join them.
5. Invest in infrastructure to allow for:
 - a. Safe movement of data and information over the internet to avoid unnecessary use of scarce resources.
 - b. Collecting and collating information into one single digital case file for the murder investigation to give prosecutors and MP analysts the ability to study the case, cross reference it with other cases, etc.

Investigative Team

This incredibly labor intensive process was led by **Steven Dudley**, co-director of InSight Crime. He initially worked with **Carlos Mendoza**, formerly of the Central American Business Initiative; Mendoza is now at the Finance Ministry.

Julie López worked tirelessly the last quarter of the project compiling data and interviewing analysts and police. López and **Victoria Dittmar** went through and catalogued the hundreds of preliminary police reports that we gathered from Chiquimula and Zona 18.

Steven Dudley wrote the report, with assistance from Mendoza and López. **Jaime López-Aranda**, a former Mexican government official who specializes in data collection and analysis, reviewed and commented on the methodology and drafts of the report.

InSight Crime would like to thank Guatemala's **PNC**, the **MP's** office, and the **Interior Ministry** for their assistance in this project.

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16. We loosely defined this as an area used to move illicit drugs in large quantities. However, there is no standard definition for this type of area. The proxy used to determine it is normally seizures, but in Guatemala, seizures are small and seemingly random, making it nearly impossible to apply.
17. We loosely defined this as an area where gangs hold a monopoly or near-monopoly on the use of force. However, there is no standard definition for this type of area. The proxy used to determine a gang-controlled area is normally complaints of extortion from companies with 50 employees or smaller; from bus and taxi cooperatives; and from small shop owners and individuals. But Guatemala has no systematic accounting of these complaints.

18. The project based this criteria on a similar developed by the Mexican government during the Felipe Calderón administration. Jaime López-Aranda, a former official in the Mexican agency that developed this methodology, was a consultant on this project.
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40. By organized crime, we mean a structured group of people that associate on a regular and prolonged basis to benefit from illicit activities and illegal markets. This group can be local, national or transnational in nature, and its existence is maintained using violence and threats; corruption of public officials; and its influence on society, politics and the economy.
41. The media sources that were double-checked were: michiquimula.com and rescates-20.com, the local firemen's website.
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49. This was the case in June 2016 because the messenger was also in charge of the motorcycle's maintenance and poured battery liquid in a battery that required gel.
50. These summarized reports are based on the responding officer's report. They cover everything that was reported in that precinct that day, from homicides to car theft, to arrests, to

recovery of a kidnap victims.

51. CompStat stands for "Computer Comparison Statistics." It is utilized by police and other security forces to map crime statistics over long periods of time, allowing them to better deploy and utilize their human resources to prevent crime.

52. Several countries in Latin America are exploring these possibilities, most notably Colombia. There, the police have implemented the so-called Quadrant Plan (Plan Cuadrantes) in several major cities, which utilizes geo-referenced crime data to determine priorities and utilization of resources.

The InSight Crime Foundation

InSight Crime is a foundation dedicated to the study of the principal threat to national and citizen security in Latin America and the Caribbean: organized crime.

InSight Crime's goal is to deepen understanding on organized crime in the Americas through on-the-ground investigation and analysis from a transnational and policy perspective.

We fulfill this mission by:

- providing high quality and timely analysis of news events linked to organized crime in the region;
- investigating and writing reports on organized crime and its multiple manifestations, including its impact on human rights, governance, drug policy and other social, economic and political issues;
- giving workshops to journalists, academics and non-governmental organizations on how to cover this important issue and keep themselves, their sources and their material safe;
- supporting local investigators through these workshops and by publishing, translating and promoting their work to reach the widest possible audience;
- developing a region-wide network of investigators looking at organized crime;
- presenting in public and closed-door sessions to governments, non-governmental organizations, academics and stakeholders on best practices, strategies and pitfalls in implementing citizen security policy on the ground.

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